APRIL 2018 VOLUME 28 ISSUE 4

BFI

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight&Sound

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12/03/18

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12/03/18

the killing of a sacred deer
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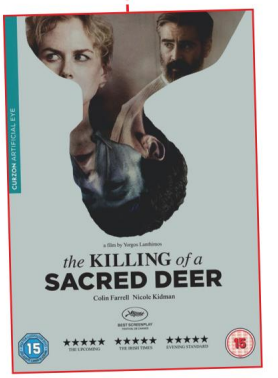

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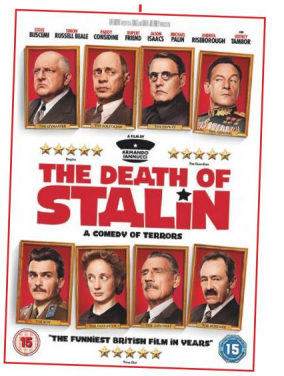

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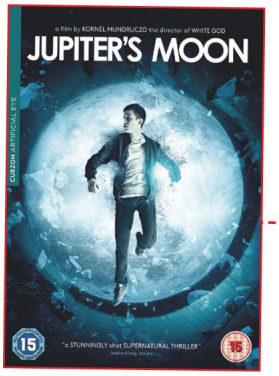

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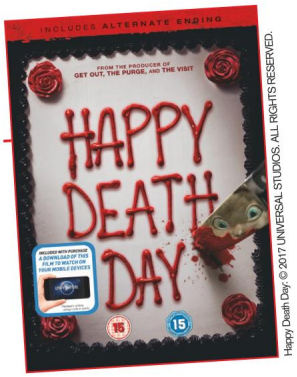

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the little hours
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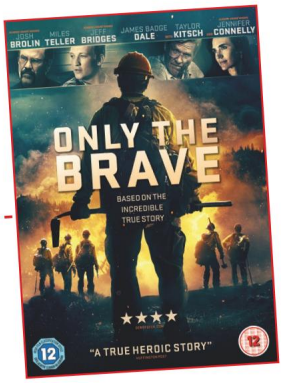

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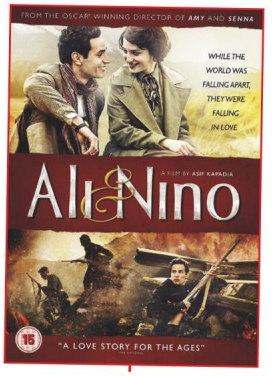

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COVER

Wes Anderson by Charlie Gray. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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Digital edition available from 2 April
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HAVE A NICE DAY

67 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Competition

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Editorial Nick James

THE ICE WOMAN COMETH

When writing about Steven Soderbergh's new film *Unsane* recently, I recalled a desire I had back around the year 2000 to write something asking why there were so few cold protagonists. Why did films then seem to have to be mainly built around someone who, if they were not initially attractive, warm, wonderful and nice, had to be redeemed as such by the end? After all, I would have argued, somewhat banally, human beings are, by and large, morally complex and usually flawed, and shouldn't the movies reflect that in more realistic situations than the classic gangster as tragic hero mode, the femme fatale, or the James Bond antihero stance?

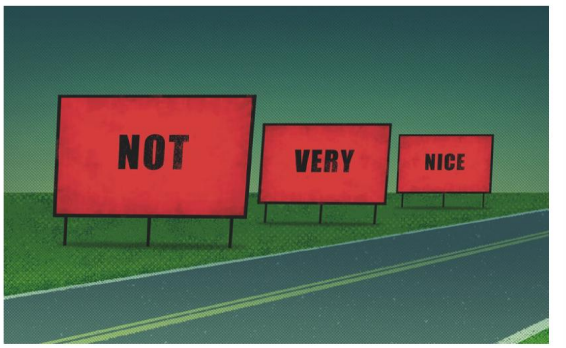
If I hadn't already realised times had changed, the news that *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* had dominated the Bafta awards, just as it did the Golden Globes, made it certain. In particular Frances McDormand had won for her role as the flinty, grieving Mildred Hayes, who at one point in the film knees a young student in the crotch for not answering a question, and later fire-bombs a police station, causing severe burns to an admittedly racist cop.

You might say that's just the typical aggressive behaviour of a male western protagonist, and I might not disagree with you. But there are some who do. The critics Adam Mars-Jones (in the *TLS*) and Ryan Gilbey (in the *New Statesman*), for instance, are very vocal in their distaste for the film's moral messaging. I'm more interested in why filmmakers like Martin McDonagh choose to build a female lead role like Hayes. *Unsane*'s lead Sawyer Valentini (Claire Foy) is similar: unburdened by politesse, she too lashes out in violence as a first response, although we're meant to wonder about the state of her mental health, so violence may be excused, and indeed mental health is arguably also an issue with Hayes.

That makes two women who fit my brief, and as I considered the idea further I realised that there was a lightbulb moment for me when watching the television series *Doctor Foster*. At first Gemma Foster appalled me: a wronged woman (brilliantly played by Suranne Jones) whose lying husband cheats on her, she used every dirty trick in the book to get her own back, seemingly without a single moment's care for her reputation or for the damage it might do to her son. My, how soon we were cheering her on.

Obviously, all these examples are of women and they're all creations of male screenwriters: McDonagh devised Hayes, Jonathan Bernstein and James Greer created Valentini, and Mike Bartlett is responsible for Foster. Yet there are seemingly cold protagonists created by women, too – the most obvious being the focus of the series *Olive Kitteridge*, written by Elizabeth Strout and starring – who else? – McDormand as a misanthropic retired teacher. I don't think she's given to violence, though.

Why are these women emerging in fictions? Is it just to get away from the old restrictive Madonna and whore choices of roles? If so, they come at a time when a study shows that there was a drop in the number of female leads in the box-office top 100 for 2017. The need for more opportunities and stories for and about women remains as it has been for a while. It is curious, too, that these cold protagonists should exist at the moment when social media is so dominated by 'virtue signalling', by the idea of flaunting moral superiority.



Frances McDormand won theBafta for her role as the flinty, grieving Mildred Hayes, who knees a student in the crotch and fire-bombs a police station

To make sure my idea of the coming of the cold protagonist wasn't misguided I went and looked at the *Sight & Sound* issues from 2000. It was the year we covered *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (coldness, for sure), *The Insider*, *The Green Mile*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Ghost Dog* and *The End of the Affair*. Sensitive males abounded – even Matt Damon as Ripley is straining to be so. The exceptions were perhaps *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman, who had the same excuse as Valentini of possible mental illness, and Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*. But the film that seemed to epitomise the time was *American Beauty*, starring Kevin Spacey as Lester Burnham, a man undergoing a classic mid-life crisis, in which he discovers coldness inside and gets to tear into modern suburban life in a not dissimilar manner to Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*. Of course, Alan Ball's script as filmed by Sam Mendes redeems him from his creepy intentions towards his daughter's cheerleading pal with a last-minute attack of conscience.

That wouldn't happen in a film now. We wouldn't believe it (especially, of course, if Spacey was cast). We want our protagonists in realist films to be deeply flawed, more like ourselves perhaps, with mental health among the issues we're open about. Thus the cinema gets used to experience the emotions, or absence thereof, we can't admit to experiencing in public or on social media. Times have changed indeed.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON COOPER AT WWW.COOPERILLO.COM

ON OUR RADAR

▲ Annihilation

After a brief theatrical run in the US, sci-fi horror film *Annihilation* from *Ex Machina* (2015) director Alex Garland will reach British shores on 12 March, by way of Netflix – to the disappointment of some, including the film's director, who insists *Annihilation* is intended for a theatrical setting. The film, which has been receiving rave reviews, is adapted from author Jeff VanderMeer's acclaimed *Southern Reach Trilogy* books, and stars Natalie Portman (pictured) and Jennifer Jason Leigh. Alongside last month's release of Duncan Jones's *Mute*, the launch marks a big push into prestige science fiction for the streaming giant. The film should be worth a watch regardless of how you come across it, though make an effort to see it on the largest available streaming-ready screen, for Alex's sake.

◀ The Agnès Varda Collection

Curzon Artificial Eye has put out an impressive eight-film Blu-ray box-set of films by Agnès Varda (pictured), including classics such as *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), *Le Bonheur* (1965) and *Vagabond* (1985), as well as more recent work like *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008). Also included are several short films, a wealth of interviews and accompanying documentaries, and a 100-page booklet of essays edited by *Sight & Sound*'s own Isabel Stevens and featuring writing from regular *S&S* contributors Pamela Hutchinson, Sophie Mayer, Edward Lawrenson, Jonathan Romney and more. As Varda approaches her 90th birthday – and with the release of her latest documentary *Faces Places* in the pipeline – this set offers a thorough introduction to her work.

▲ Sergio Leone at the BFI

A Sergio Leone-centric westerns season plays at BFI Southbank, London, throughout April, giving London audiences the chance to see the likes of *For a Few Dollars More* (1964, pictured) and *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968) as they demand to be seen: on the big screen. The programme also includes a number of recent contemporary westerns to play against Leone's, including Warwick Thornton's *Sweet Country* (see feature on page 28, and review on page 76) and Chloé Zhao's *The Rider*, as well as a pair of documentaries looking at the legacy of the western genre in Africa as part of Southbank's ongoing African Odysseys programme.

▶ Claire Denis's High Life

We here at *Sight & Sound* have been savouring the first bits of news about Claire Denis's surprising upcoming film *High Life* (pictured). It marks a number of departures for the French director – her first film not in the French language, as well as her first foray into science fiction, a surprise from a filmmaker who has mostly avoided genre in her 30-year career. It also features an uncharacteristically starry cast, with Robert Pattinson in the lead and support that includes previous Denis collaborator Juliette Binoche, Mia Goth and rapper André '3000' Benjamin. This project will be one to watch as more information is revealed.

▼ BFI Flare London LGBTQ+ Film Festival

The BFI's annual LGBTQ+ festival returns (21 March to 1 April) with a programme that as always mixes some high-profile titles with more obscure queer oddities. Opening with the romance/legal drama *My Days of Mercy*, starring Ellen Page and Kara Mara, this year's festival also features headliners like Robin Campillo's Aids drama *120 BPM* (pictured) and the virally hyped teen coming-out drama *Love, Simon*. Other major titles this year include controversial South African gay Xhosa drama *The Wound*; the Oscar Wilde biopic *The Happy Prince*, written and directed by – and starring – Rupert Everett; Brazilian multi-genre genuine whatsit *Good Manners*; the Cannes-vetted genderqueer coming-of-age drama *They*; and New York fashion illustrator documentary *Antonio Lopez 1970: Sex Fashion & Disco* (reviewed on page 56).

◀ Tacita Dean: Landscape, Portrait, and Still Life

An ambitious triple exhibition by Berlin-based British artist Tacita Dean (pictured) spans three venues (the Royal Academy of Art, National Portrait Gallery and National Gallery), focusing on a particular mode of visual art in each – Landscape, Portrait and Still Life, respectively. The exhibitions will feature new and earlier film, photographic and other work by Dean, tackling questions about each genre's place in art history and the ways in which audiences engage with different styles of art. The Portrait and Still Life exhibitions open on 15 March and run to the end of May, with the Landscape focus following on 19 May and running until August.

THE STUFF OF LEGEND

The threatened sale of London's Cinema Museum premises puts a rare collection of memorabilia – and a key community resource – at risk

By Matthew Harle and Jack Wormell

The Cinema Museum was founded by collectors and enthusiasts Ronald Grant and Martin Humphries in 1984 as a museum and archive of cinema-going and exhibition, principally during the eras of early cinema and Golden Age Hollywood. The museum's contents pour out of each doorway, trails of cinema paraphernalia guiding visitors into overstuffed rooms with boxes stacked ten high to the ceiling. Alongside the collections are two cinemas: the main hall, which is a popular venue for counter-cinema and silent film events, and a screening room. This is the best and most immediately significant example of the Cinema Museum's brilliantly paradoxical mission: that a museum dedicated to the most popular mainstream recreation of the last century has also become a home for London's marginalised and specialist filmmakers, collectors and hobbyists. It is the closest place Britain has ever had to the Cinémathèque in Paris during the latter's crowning, idiosyncratic years: a vast and utterly haphazard personal collection of film and film memorabilia, with an accessible screening space dedicated to cinema and filmmakers.

Since 1998 the collection has been housed in a Victorian building off a side street in Elephant and Castle, in South London. The structure was originally built as a sprawling workhouse, to accommodate 870 destitute families. It is the same workhouse where Charlie Chaplin was separated from his mother as a child, a detail Grant and Humphries are at pains to highlight to visitors on their tours, not as an exploitative or idle gesture, but because Chaplin's impoverished childhood has a bearing on the collections, in terms of the often obsessive, compulsive and marginalised life stories that haunt the collections.

Since October 2017 the Cinema Museum's home has been under threat. The landlord, a specialised mental health trust of the National Health Service, has backed out of a promise to sell the freehold of the building for a fair price to the museum. Instead, the trust's head has been turned by the exorbitant land value of the site and it has declared that it is now preparing to sell to the highest bidder, informing the museum that their lease expires in March 2018. It is a gross irony that it is an embattled mental health division of the NHS that delivers this message; and it is depressingly characteristic of a city where public services and public cultural life are made to compete, while private investment is sacrosanct. As a result, it is now very possible that one of central London's last independent and countercultural spaces will fall victim to an ever-expanding housing bubble; and that the screening rooms, library and storage spaces will soon be home to oblivious wealthy clients occupying overpriced apartments in a block given a tepid, marketable name in tribute: 'The Old Workhouse' – brimming with cultural capital, but devoid of actual culture.

The origins of the collection stand in direct opposition to the values of the economic world in which the museum has been trying to survive, not least because Grant and Humphries's lives have been informed by political activism (both appear in the 1980 subversive pastiche police training tape *Watch Out There's a Queer About*). The collections are consciously democratic and inclusive, prizing the obscure and unconventional – their presence around the building provides a reminder of the museum's role as a sanctuary, bound together by the obsessional, intimate working relationships that the founders and their volunteers and network of comrade cinephiles have created. The museum often offers refuge to volunteers and attendees who would otherwise rely further on the very NHS trust that is likely to evict them.

The gold rush: the museum building was once a workhouse where Charlie Chaplin was sent as a child

Like so many archives, the Cinema Museum arose from a personal collection, stemming from Grant's insatiable desire to preserve the world of film that consumed him as a child. He became an apprentice projectionist at the Aberdeen Picture Palaces at the age of 15, and in the 1960s moved to London, working at the National Film Theatre and the Brixton Ritzy. On a trip back to Aberdeen in the 1970s, he found the Picture Palaces closing down, and all the equipment, signage and paraphernalia headed for the dump. Aghast, Ronald redirected truckloads of objects to a warehouse, inadvertently founding the collection. Fast-forward almost half a century, and a natural symmetry to this story can be found in the museum's events schedule. During the Cinema Museum's tenure in Chaplin's workhouse, it has become the home for off-kilter archive film culture. There is an event every night: it hosts Kennington Bioscope, a regular film screening; memorabilia fairs and bookstalls; the much-loved Home Movie Day; as well being the only venue where you can enjoy an evening with the actor Murray Melvin, or witness film historian Kevin Brownlow being grilled on aspect ratio by a museum regular.

The closure of the museum would be catastrophic for London's independent film culture, and for filmmakers and collectors

At the heart of this world are, again, the museum's collections: a near endless archive that unites people and their compulsions. Pick out a random item hung on the wall, or sitting in a corner of a corridor, and Grant can tell you where it comes from and why it is probably more precious than you assume (you're sitting on a very rare seat fitting from the Hove Gaumont), or why that dust sheet can't be moved (it covers an unidentifiable object from the Crown Film Unit), or why this little cardboard box is actually very valuable (it has to do with Joan Crawford, and there was a film about it). He can show you the latest acquisitions, the back issues of *Variety*, relics from the earliest days of cinema-going – and, if you are lucky, the two handmade cabinets, tucked away at the back of the library, that contain the Vic Kinson Stars Archive.

If the Cinema Museum is evicted and its collections dispersed, we will think of the Vic

Kinson Stars Archive before anything else. This is a cross between a film diary and an immense paper IMDb. Over the course of his adult life, Vic, a bookkeeper for a grain company in Derbyshire, compiled a jaw-dropping collection of 36,000 bespoke index cards, each bearing an eccentric list of data about actors – name, date of birth, height, eye colour, marriages, hobbies and more. On the back of each card is a list of films the actor has starred in, and the date and cinema in which Vic saw the film, from his first visit to the Measham Empire in 1940 until his final card entry in 2012. An expansive, indexical autobiography emerges from the collection: Vic's lifelong project – kept private until his grandchildren donated it to the museum – as much an attempt to reach out and write about his life as it was a resource of information about the hobbies of Cyd Charisse or marriages of Alan Ladd.

There are countless other Vic Kinsons in the museum, both in its collections and in person, hovering around the hallways. The legacies of these cinephiles materialise in many forms: scrapbooks, trays of ushers' badges, newspaper clippings, cinema-going diaries, distribution bulletins. But, unlike vintage projectors or movie posters, these do not have obvious historic or monetary value. They are created by ordinary people consumed by screens – the traces of their everyday life woven into the collections. "These are not special people," notes Humphries as we riffle through their cinephile collections – but this is precisely what drives the Cinema Museum to collect them.

These collections and the social world of the museum remind us that cinephilia is still very much alive in its traditional material sense, and that collecting is a vital instinct which must be protected, especially when its methodology deviates from, or stands in opposition to, those of major state-funded museums and archives. But the fate of the museum should also shape broader conversations about the dwindling countercultural spaces and centres of exhibition in London. It is precisely spaces like this and the unassuming labours of its founders that trace a clear line from golden-age cinema exhibition to modern screening collectives, many of whom have inherited the fetishism of celluloid that Grant and Humphries have protected for so long.

The closure of the museum would not only be catastrophic for the collection, for London's independent film culture, for the organisers of genre, cult or experimental film nights, and for filmmakers or collectors; it would be a loss of the expression of the lived experience of film-going – a structure of feeling that cannot be recreated in boutique cinemas or pigeonholed in academic categories. That is why collections like Vic Kinson's provide the most poignant contrast between the ambitions of the museum and the economic landscape in which they and the NHS are being forced to compete – a landscape where finances are allowed to be speculative, yet the ineffable traces of the eccentric, the unconventional and the compulsive that evoke the spirit of the museum must suddenly reveal their value.

To sign the petition to save the Cinema Museum, go to bit.ly/2COPAIT

THE NUMBERS
HERO VENUES

By Charles Gant

With the glut of weekly film releases, often approaching 20 in number, the complaint is regularly heard that films are no longer afforded the chance to nurture an audience, instead yanked unceremoniously from venues to make way for the next wave of product.

And yet a steady trickle of arthouse titles manages to defy that trend. Take Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name*, which Sony released on the last weekend of October 2017, and which has played continually at the Curzon Soho in London ever since. The venue was the top performer for the film for 16 consecutive weeks.

While *Call Me by Your Name* has steadily built up an impressive £1.58 million gross in that time, playing a total of 258 cinemas across the UK and Ireland, Curzon Soho's contribution to that tally is especially remarkable: £255,000, or 16.1 per cent of the total.

The British Film Institute's Audience Fund remains appropriately focused on developing broader opportunities for cinemagoers across the UK, helping to push niche titles regionally – but the fact remains that an individual film's success often receives a significant boost from the contribution of a single hero venue. And within the UK and Ireland, it's London and Dublin where independent cinemas are likely to have the best opportunities to hold a film for an extended period.

London's ICA Cinema has a knack for keeping films playing for sustained periods, and it has just been enjoying an amazing run with the arthouse animation *Loving Vincent*. At press time, after 19 weeks of continuous play, the cinema had grossed £46,000 on the title – eclipsed only by IFI Dublin, which played it for ten weeks, grossing £51,000.

Laura Poitras's Edward Snowden documentary *Citizenfour* did even better than *Loving Vincent* at the ICA, grossing £51,000 over the course of its long run – out of a UK total of £162,000. Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* played every week for a year at the ICA, grossing £35,000 of the film's £133,000 UK total.

Toast of Soho: *Call Me by Your Name*

The distributor Peccadillo found a more surprising hero partner with the release of Andrew Haigh's gay drama *Weekend* in 2011. After failing to secure attractive show-times from Central London indie sites, the film was booked into the Odeon Covent Garden, where it grossed £105,000 of its £222,000 lifetime total. Six years later, *God's Own Country* flourished at both Curzon Soho and Picturehouse Central – with the latter ultimately edging out its rival thanks to an epic 13-week run, playing host to several meet-ups of the film's unofficial fan club.

Meanwhile, fashion-themed films traditionally play well at Curzon Mayfair, none more so than the 2009 documentary *The September Issue*, which grossed £106,000 there from a £428,000 UK total.

For practitioners with long memories, the trend is nothing new. According to Curzon programme director Damian Spandley, "It's basically a throwback to the days when cinemas played films for months on end. Curzon Mayfair's top film of all time is *Howards End* [1992], which played for a year in the cinema and took more than £1 million from just this one site. In those days, like in theatre land, the association between a particular cinema and the right title was very powerful, and runs were the endgame, a sign of success."

INDIVIDUAL VENUE PERFORMANCES AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Venue/Gross	UK Gross
Call Me by Your Name, 2016	Curzon Soho: £255,000*	£1.58m
Pina, 2011	Curzon Mayfair: £187,000	£666,000
Amour, 2012	Curzon Soho: £133,000	£887,000
The September Issue, 2009	Curzon Mayfair, £106,000	£428,000
Weekend, 2011	Odeon Covent Garden: £105,000	£222,000
Russian Ark, 2003	Curzon Renoir: £91,000	£472,000
God's Own Country	Picturehouse Central: £64,000	£869,000
Embrace of the Serpent, 2016	Curzon Bloomsbury: £59,000	£281,000
Citizenfour, 2014	ICA: £51,000	£162,000
The Act of Killing, 2013	ICA: £35,000	£131,000

Selected titles; *still playing at press time

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TWIN PEAKS

The careers of Susan Hayward and Lena Horne offer a fascinating insight into 20th-century America – and into the sidelining of women

By Mark Cousins

Some years ago I started reading about the career of the African-American singer and movie actor Lena Horne. I'd read that her scenes in otherwise white films were often cut out when the movies were shown in the Southern states. To anticipate this redaction, the filming of Horne and other African-American actors was often done in a more standalone manner.

Also, I'd seen her films *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) and wanted to know more about how Hollywood came to make such all-black musicals. I quickly discovered that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had lobbied the studios, and the participation of black soldiers in World War II made 'white-washing' a bit less acceptable. I'd first seen Horne in Santiago Alvarez's blisteringly radical short film *Now* (1965), a call to military arms against American racism. How did she get from tame Hollywood musicals to the barricades?

In the course of this research, I also discovered that another movie star, Susan Hayward, was born on the same day as Horne – 30 June 1917 – and in the same place, Brooklyn. I rewatched Hayward's most famous films, read a few biographies, and got hooked by her. Then my mind started jumping between these movie twins, Horne and Hayward. Flick your eyes from one thing to its adjacent, and the differences and similarities become clear. Horne and Hayward started to look like a diptych to me, a joint portrait of America's 20th century.

Their differences first: Horne was middle class, Hayward so poor that her family sometimes went without food. In her youth, Horne saw a lynching and, later, when she lived on Sunset Boulevard, some of her neighbours signed a petition to have her removed. Hayward got to star in films by major directors – Jacques Tourneur, Cecil B. DeMille, Nicholas Ray, Joseph Mankiewicz, etc. With the exception of Vincente Minnelli's *Cabin in the Sky*, and Andrew L. Stone's *Stormy Weather*, Horne usually got small parts.

Hayward's films often had an intriguing first-person quality – their titles include *My Foolish Heart* (1949), *With a Song in My Heart* (1952), *I'll Cry Tomorrow* (1955), *I Want to Live!* (1958), etc – and some of the most famous are about alcoholics and actors. Hayward was both. Horne's films were never so personal but she was perhaps forced to ask herself more searching questions about her identity. She once said, "I was a feminist before I was a negro," and talked about being a false symbol for years before people like her grandmother (who was in the NAACP), Orson Welles and Paul Robeson opened her eyes to "politics and the social order". Horne visited the White House of JFK, Hayward dined with Nixon.

Many of these contrasts are the products of racial and class divisions in the US in the mid-20th century. But the Hollywoodisation of both women left them with much in common. Both became strikingly successful. Hayward was the highest-paid actress in Hollywood and at various times was the top female box-office star in the world, and the top money-earner for both MGM and Fox. Horne had to wait until later to hit the highs – she was the first African American to win a Tony and her 1981 one-woman show *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music* holds the record for the longest-running solo show on Broadway.

From two worlds, they reached a similar interiority: a result of Hollywood not understanding its duty of care to its actors

As a result, both suffered press intrusion – notably when Hayward took an overdose after the breakdown of a marriage, and pictures of her unconscious body appeared on the front pages. Horne famously made the papers when she hurled an ashtray at a man who had racially abused her in Beverly Hills.

Hayward's publicity praised the whiteness of her skin (she was of Irish and Swedish descent), but Horne, too, was talked about in terms of light skin, though MGM devised a make-up called 'light Egyptian' to make her darker. Hayward was told that her voice was too high; Horne was sometimes criticised for having a 'light' voice that couldn't sing the blues.

Given this fetishisation and intrusion, it comes as no surprise that both became disaffected by filmmaking, with the town without pity. Hayward called Hollywood "the dung heap"; Horne was blacklisted. Moreover, in each life we can begin to see a combination of withdrawal and anger. In her autobiography, co-written with Richard Schickel, Horne said, "When I perform, I develop... a guile and toughness... isolation of this kind is really just a form of disguised hostility. My distance, my aloofness, gave my performance the psychological framework it needed." Hayward was often accused of hostility to directors and fellow actors too. Her drama coach, Frank Beckwith, said that she couldn't feel real emotion. In one interview, she said: "The only way I knew how to protect myself was to try to scare people before they could scare me." That's what Horne was saying too, isn't it?

Hayward died on 14 March 1975, aged 57. Horne died on 9 May 2010, aged 92. From two very different, coinciding worlds, they reached a similar interiority: a result of Hollywood not understanding its duty of care to its actors, a theme of some relevance today.

I've just premiered a film at the International Film Festival Rotterdam – *Storm in My Heart* – which uses the films of Horne and Hayward to hint at their interiority and to remind us of their work in cinema. Ironically, the far smaller filmography – Horne's – is perhaps more discussed by movie historians because it was a symbol of something, of a pioneering African-American talent. Hayward is written about far less. She was born just 37 days before Robert Mitchum and her screen career is just as interesting as his. Why is she overlooked?

ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH

ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

THAT UNCERTAIN FEELING

Luke Fowler's darting, rueful films explore the diverse hopes and dreams of misfits and idealists, from R.D. Laing to post-punk singers

By Sukhdev Sandhu

What would it be like to watch Luke Fowler's *Country Grammar* (2017) without having seen any of his earlier films? It begins with a woman, bearing a trace resemblance to Throbbing Gristle's Cosey Fanni Tutti, singing into a studio microphone. Is it singing? Her voice is sometimes child-like, sometimes a post-punk sneer, sometimes a Dada jabber. She repeats words and phrases with great intensity: "I want certain feelings", "If you feel like I feel", "Try! Try! Try!", "Taking photos yeah!" Is this a kind of stutter she has to get past? Does she know what she's doing or is she a little ill? Is she agitating for something or just agitated?

It's hard to know when the film is from. The singer's running shoes suggest contemporary footage, but she's wearing glam-style make-up, the recording equipment seems to come from an analogue era, and there's a brown-ness that recalls the beige sofas and dim lighting of early 1970s Polaroids. At times, it kindles distant memories of regional television news reports about local bands recording their debut LPs. But what about the filmmaker's repeated focus on the woman's shoulders or on her wrists, or the way sound and image are not in synch? Whatever this is, it's not straight documentary.

As *Country Grammar* continues, the woman's voice migrates and is heard over shots of books on a windowsill, the preparation of vegetables in a kitchen, flowerbeds in public parks. Sometimes, as in lingering shots of Victorian brickwork or fading murals on public housing estates, there's an indefinable aura of nostalgia. Are these landscapes the world from which the singing emerged? The world the singing seeks to disrupt? The film, though it has no voiceover or title cards, is certainly not hermetic, but neither is it signposted or insistent about its meaning.

Would it be helpful to know that the singer is Sue Tompkins, a Glasgow-based artist who often uses text and language in her work, and who, at the turn of the century, was vocalist in Life Without Buildings, a short-lived art-rock band revered by a small but passionate fanbase? She's heard – and felt vibrationally – throughout, but the film is not biographical. If the word 'grammar' suggests structure, a way of clarifying and making headway through the thicket of language, then Tompkins's riddling, almost private syntax is perhaps best served by a filmmaker with an instinct for ambiguity, irresolution, hermeticism.

For more than 20 years, Fowler (b.1978) has been refining an immediately recognisable filmography that explores the lives and legacies of individuals regarded as marginal or troublesome in their own lifetimes, and who have been forgotten or disappeared by the gatekeepers of cultural history. These include the radical 'anti' psychiatrist R.D. Laing (*What You See Is Where You're At*, 2001); Xentos Jones – aka L. Voag – of post-punk/ DIY outfits such as The Homosexuals and Amos & Sara (*The Way Out*, 2003); Cornelius Cardew, a former assistant to avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who later founded the Scratch Orchestra for musicians with a wide range of musical abilities (*Pilgrimage from Scattered Points*, 2006); a reclusive environmentalist with a troubled family past (*Bogman Palmjaguar*, 2007).

The reasons these figures eluded or fell out of fashion are complex. Laing's belief that capitalism wrecks mental health may seem unexceptional these days (and underpins the influential writings of the late Mark Fisher), but, when combined with the psychiatrist's testiness and drink problems, it made him a problematic figure in the years before his death. E.P. Thompson, the subject of *The Poor Stockinger, the Luddite Cropper and the Deluded Followers of Joanna Southcott* (2012), played a crucial role in the development of working-class historiography during the 1960s, but his public

(Clockwise from top left) *Bogman Palmjaguar*, *Pilgrimage from Scattered Points*, *What You See Is Where You're At*, *To the Editor of Amateur Photographer*

COURTESY OF LUKE FOWLER AND LUX, LONDON

commitment to Marxism and the scorn he heaped on critical theory made him seem anachronistic to subsequent generations of postmodernists.

Fowler doesn't make biographical portraits of the kind that, once in a while, pop up on BBC4. His subjects don't stay in focus in the manner of John Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013); Huw Wahl's biography of anarchist philosopher and ICA co-founder Herbert Read *To Hell with Culture* (2013); or Cordelia Dvorak's *John Berger* or *The Art of Looking* (2016). Fowler's father taught politics at Glasgow University and his mother was a sociologist, but his own approach is far from scientific or positivist; his films are intuitive and darting, sometimes disorientating in their use of Super 8 and 16mm footage, influenced by structuralist cinema in their willingness to be completely silent or to play with light and colour. They are sceptical of narration or even explanation.

What's unusual about Fowler is how seamlessly he moves between two poles of British cultural studies – that rooted in labour, and that more aligned with the politics of pleasure. On the one hand, there is *To the Editor of Amateur Photographer* (2014), a film about the Pavilion in Leeds, founded in 1983 as the United Kingdom's first feminist photography centre. Here is a work that deals with women's oppression, with collective action, with what one voice defines as "activists in the sphere of representation". The typefaces and textures of this world, which flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s, are potently, lovingly evoked: here are zine-y newsletters, mimeographed minutes, reports about lease applications and boards of management. At the same time, this materialist exploration of a lost and often utopian world is offset by spasms of electronica, a jagged soundtrack that channels Soft Cell and Age of Chance, the Leeds of synth pop and dancefloor dislocation.

This interest in music (a characteristic of the Glasgow art scene, in which the likes of Martin Creed, Jim Lambie, Lucy McKenzie and David Shrigley have all made or produced records) runs deep. Fowler runs the Shadazz label, plays in the band Rude Pravo, and often collaborates with sound artists such as Lee Patterson and Mark Fell. All his films are profoundly radiophonic. In *For Christian* (2016), the composer Christian Wolff gives an account of his lateral approach to music-making that might apply to Fowler's filmmaking: "My music has pedagogical elements. These pieces of music, before you can even play them, you have to learn a whole new thing about how to play music. And maybe I have to help you, or maybe you have to do it by yourself. The preparation of my music sometimes involves too much! So it is a kind of educational process."

Pedagogy lies at the heart of *The Poor Stockinger*, which is preoccupied with that period in E.P. Thompson's life when he was employed by the Workers' Educational Association and taught literature and social history to adults in industrial towns in West Riding. These classes were open to men and women who weren't qualified or couldn't afford to go to university but were hungering for knowledge. Fowler has an abiding interest in para-academia – individuals who fashion their own eccentric curriculae, alternative intellectual spaces such as the Antiuniversity of London, with which Laing was associated in the 1960s, the non-hierarchical and non-conservatory musical strategies that Cardew developed.

Fowler's modern usage: Sue Tompkins in *Country Grammar*

In Fowler's films the dream of a new kind of education is also that of a new kind of selfhood, of enhanced solidarity, of a radical society. Education itself becomes a landscape, one that the director dreams of being liberated from the enclosures that capitalism seeks to implement. *Depositions* (2014) is a gorgeously and almost deliriously constructed essay about Scotland – part paean, part protest – that looks at the Shetlands, at tinker and traveller communities, at groups who throughout history have fought to shape their own social environments. It ends with 70s footage of a wonderful oration to camera by a television presenter who warns against the tarmacadamisation of the imagination: "Unofficial culture is always under pressure. The marketable bits of it taken over for commercial use and the more subtle elements ignored and devalued. And in that wider scene the media play a vital role, especially TV, which looks like becoming a sort of cultural silicon chip encouraging us to live out our lives in the flickering half-light of someone else's dreams."

Depositions burbles with initially bewildering images of sperm samples and rock pools. It also has many rich-hued clips from old folk documentaries and from John Mackenzie's TV adaptation of John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1974), a blistering assault on cultural dispossession and resource extraction whose stage original was watched by nearly ten per cent of Scots. It's at once an example of the geological approach to art that Dieter Roelstraete wrote about in his book *The Way of the Shovel* (2013), and a contribution to the new ruralism associated with directors such as Andrew Kötting, Ben Rivers and Gideon Koppel (*Sleep Furiously*, 2008).

For 20 years, Fowler has been exploring the lives of individuals regarded as marginal or troublesome in their own lifetimes

While Fowler has often talked of the importance to him of American visionaries such as Robert Beavers and Peter Hutton (the latter collaborated with him on *The Poor Stockinger…*), his work bears comparison to that of Turner prize-winner Jeremy Deller in its reanimation of the recent past. Deller's work, though – whether in his Mike Figgis-filmed historical reconstruction *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), his pop-cultural portraits (2012's *The Bruce Lacey Experience*; 2010's *So Many Ways To Hurt You*, about wrestler Adrian Street) – has a ludic, almost anarchic personality (the catalogue produced for his 2012 Hayward retrospective was entitled *Joy in People*) at odds with Fowler's more rueful approach.

More pertinent, though also perverse, is a comparison with Adam Curtis. The director of *The Trap* (2007) and *HyperNormalisation* (2016) assembles his films from archival sources, is fascinated by post-war cultural politics, and in recent years has been as likely to screen his work at galleries as have it broadcast on television. But Curtis is a louder figure, given to assertive voiceovers, committed to (tendentious) arguments. What society needs, he repeats time and time again, is a compelling vision of the future.

It's possible to regard Fowler's work as symptomatic of the backwards-glancing retromania that Curtis finds tiresome. Equally, it may induce a kind of militant melancholy. For me, Fowler's films are a sanctuary dedicated to preserving the diverse hopes and dreams of misfits and idealists. They radiate a commitment to public culture that runs counter to the malevolent philistinism of asset-stripping free marketeers. They embody an experimental humanism in which there is a productive tension between method and madness, between structure and improvisation.

"I want certain feelings," sings Sue Tompkins in *Country Grammar*. Fowler's films are an attempt at an answer: "Try! Try! Try!"

ISABELLE HUPPERT
JEAN-LOUIS TRINTIGNANT
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THE COLOURS OF WAR

A new Peter Jackson project hopes to add immediacy to footage from World War I by colourising it – but what do we stand to lose?

By Luke McKernan

The image shows two opposing forces. On the left-hand side, British officers standing in a French village in 1916 during the Battle of the Somme are seen in monochrome: monochrome skin, monochrome clothing, monochrome buildings behind them. On the right, facing them, are British troops in colour: pink faces, khaki-green uniforms, blue and red buildings behind them. They seem lined up for a battle over archives and historical truth.

The still – derived from the 1916 documentary *The Battle of the Somme* – has been published by the UK World War I centenary art organisation 14-18 NOW. It is promoting an as yet unnamed documentary film on WW1, directed by Peter Jackson and made by his company WingNut Films, in association with the Imperial War Museums. The film is scheduled to be premiered at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2018, with a BBC1 broadcast and school and cinema screenings to follow. It is clearly being planned as a major contribution to the events marking the centenary of the end of the war. What is distinctive about Jackson's film is that, in the words of the press release, it is to use "modern-day techniques such as colourisation to portray the Great War as never before", promising "to provide a 21st-century public with a unique new perspective on the 20th century's most shocking conflict".

Colourisation has long been anathema to anyone with a respect for film history. Introduced commercially in the 1980s, it was intended to breathe new commercial life into monochrome film libraries. A generation that had grown up without black-and-white film or television rejected monochrome as an annoyance. Hence the video shelves started to fill with colourised Laurel and Hardy. The colour itself was garish, unnatural, upsetting even. The film community reacted with alarm, demanding that films designed, dressed and lit to be shown in monochrome should only be seen that way. Cineastes shivered in horror at the thought of a *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca* in colour.

Colourisation proved not to be a major commercial opportunity for the studios. Colour might put red on the cheeks of Oliver Hardy, but it could not make the manner or dialogue of old feature films pertain to any times other than the ones in which they were made. Colourised videos ended up in bargain bins, and the film heritage community breathed a little more easily.

But colourisation did not go away. Techniques improved and were applied some time ago to WWI footage. In 2003 a six-part British television series, narrated by Kenneth Branagh and shown on Channel 5, rode on the bandwagon created by series such as *The Second World War in Colour* (1999) and *The British Empire in Colour* (2002). Those series had both used genuine colour footage; now, all the archive footage had been colourised. A monochrome war had been translated by a computerised paintbox.

The problem with colourising monochrome from WWI, aside from any ethical or aesthetic consideration, is that the films are not a true colour record. Films of that period were made on orthochromatic stock, sensitive to green and blue but lacking red sensitivity. Only with panchromatic stock, introduced in the 1920s, was sensitivity to all colours established. So the idea that in colourising a WWI film you can use the black-and-white record as a key to a hidden colour record was false. The authentic colour could not be digitally deduced from the monochrome. There were falsities of uniform colours, insignia, skin tones, skies and landscapes. It was a fantasy, the equivalent of a period colour postcard, or the artificially coloured films of the pre-war era, where colours were painted on to the film stock.

Colourising archive actuality film does not bring us closer to our ancestors; it increases the distance between us

How, then, to cater for those who want to see the war in colour? There has been an interesting split in the reactions to the news of Jackson's film. Some, particularly among the film archiving community, have been horrified; for others, the stronger connection with the past that colour seems to deliver outweighs this purist position, if indeed they are aware of it at all. We can connect with colour. The alien past is made more meaningful. The people look just like us, and so the magic trick works.

One can argue that film is not reality, but a reflection of reality. Overlaying it with colour is only a further treatment of that reflection of reality, a way of looking at the past rather than the pretence of being the past itself. We will have to see Jackson's film to judge properly. But there is a fundamental issue here about how we treat our actuality film archives. WWI was filmed in monochrome (a tiny amount of colour film was shot during the war in the Kinemacolor process, of which just two minutes survives, showing the British fleet off Scapa Flow in 1915). To understand that inheritance we must look at it for what it is. Colourising archive actuality film does not bring us closer to our ancestors; it increases the distance between us. It threatens to make the WWI film archive we have inherited meaningless, because we can no longer look at it sympathetically. It's the effort that creates the understanding.

Yes, on some occasions archive film can and should be manipulated for particular ends. It need not always be treated reverently in its original form alone – that way elitism lies.

But, to my mind, using it to show what it is not does more damage than good. If we want people to understand the past, we should not be colouring it.

Flying colours: Peter Jackson's film project for 14-18 NOW promises to use colourisation to portray the Great War as never before

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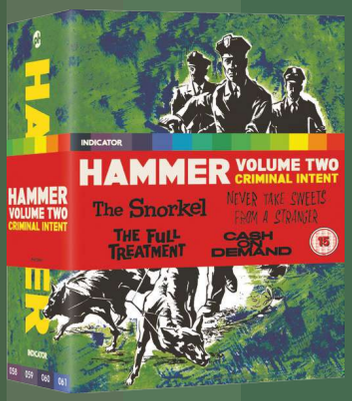

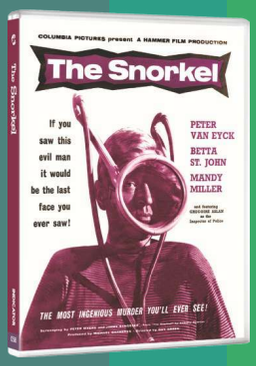

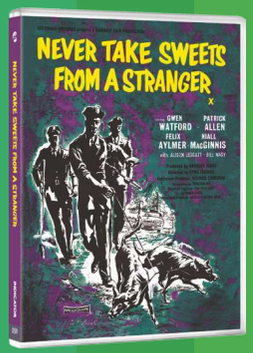

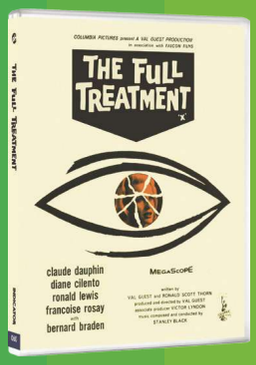

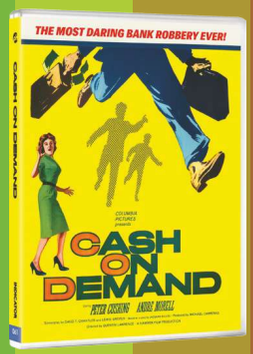

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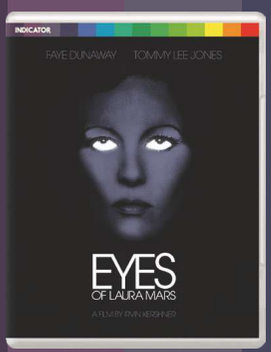

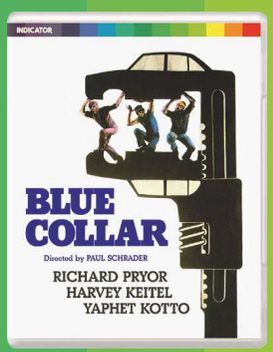

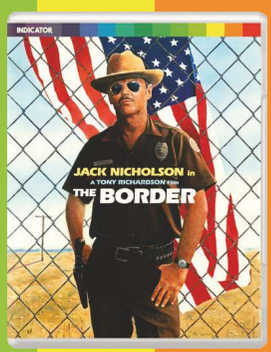

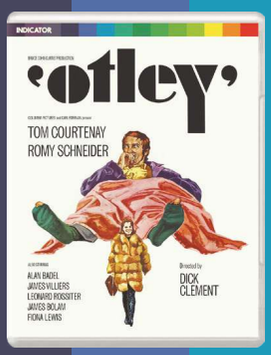

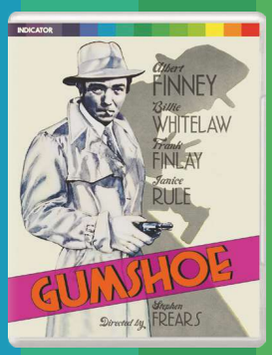

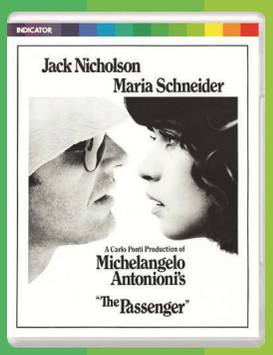

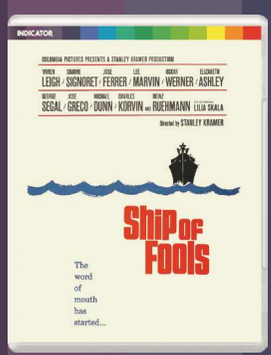

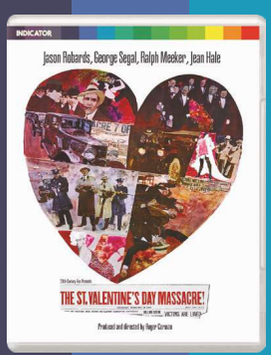

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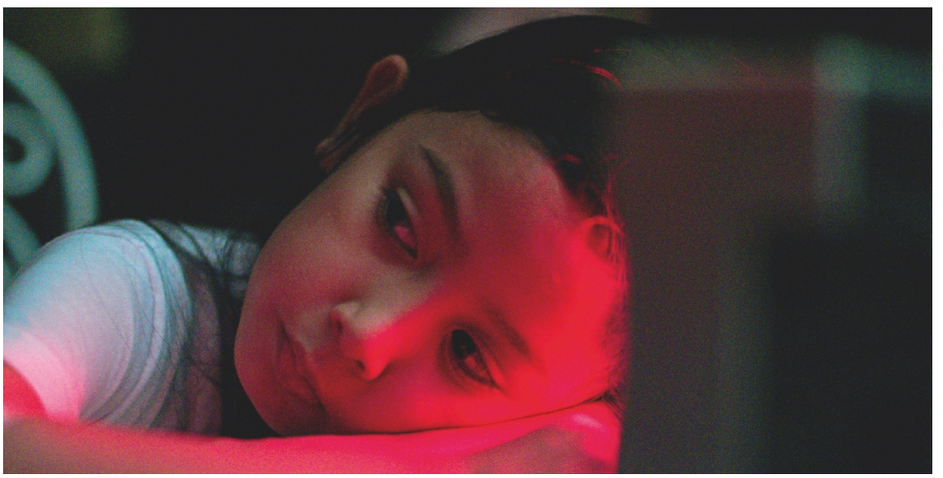
THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

In Rotterdam, heartland of globalised trade, the annual film festival gives pride of place to the small-scale and the local

By Kieron Corless

On casual acquaintance Rotterdam seems intriguingly Janus-faced. On the one hand it's Europe's largest port, a primary nexus of globalised sea trade for many years, the deleterious and standardising aspects of which were most memorably laid bare in Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's *The Forgotten Space* (2010). At the same time, the city's film festival (IFFR), its foremost cultural institution, has been for several decades Europe's pre-eminent nurturer of independent cinemas "rooted in local culture": a position finessed through the operations of its CineMart (the first festival co-production market of its kind, though nowadays they're a dime a dozen), and in particular the Hubert Bals Fund, another first at its inception in 1989 and still a standard-bearer; its avowed mission being to provide financial support for directors in emerging countries to develop "remarkable or urgent feature films". Apichatpong Weerasethakul's early career was kickstarted thus, and they don't come much more remarkable than that.

So do such interventions on the part of IFFR represent altruistic, idealistic rearguard resistance to globalisation by way of culture? It's a complex issue beyond our scope here, but the one film that for me most directly addressed the tension between local and global was not from an 'emerging country', but from Switzerland. Cyril Schäublin's first feature *Those Who Are Fine* was berthed in the festival's Bright Future section, though on this evidence the future looks anything but; more apt would be philosopher Bifo Berardi's "slow cancellation of the future". A young woman working in a call centre on the outskirts of Zurich scams elderly women out of their savings by pretending to be their granddaughters, and squirrels the money away in one of the private banks Switzerland specialises in. Locations are late-capitalist anyplaces, conversations between people tend to the transactional and repetitive-obsessive, alienation between generations and within families is rife. Formally the film is a masterclass in cool distancing and dissociation; high camera-angles, impassive acting, banal dialogue, with characters – the police mainly, it seems – suffering strange memory glitches and sudden lapses into remoteness. If that sounds blank or sterile, it's anything but, partly thanks to the acute rigour of the vision, and a strain of low-key, mordant humour – for example, an arrest so dedramatised it may set some kind of record. That there's nothing remotely 'psychological' about the acting style seems entirely apposite, given that individual motivations have been so completely co-opted by commerce and consumerism. The local here has both colluded with and been subsumed into the networked global system to such a degree that it's virtually disappeared.



Playing all the angles: Jana Agoncillo as Yael in Shireen Seno's *Nervous Translation*

There were two debut feature standouts in the main Tiger competition. Shireen Seno's *Nervous Translation*, a Hubert Bals-supported film, is set in the Philippines in 1987 not long after the coup that ousted Marcos. Most of the action takes place in the flat where Yael, a shy eight-year-old girl, lives with her somewhat distant mother. The father's long-term absence, working in Riyadh, is a source of sadness for each of them, if anything sharpened by the cassette tapes he sends, which Yael listens to surreptitiously. Yael's limited perspective is skilfully evoked, partly through withholding information – we never find out why her arms are bandaged, for example – and partly through the mini-world she constructs, which has a stunning pay-off at the finale. Seno opens up the apartment brilliantly, always finding new angles on the unfolding situation. That late 80s Philippines setting is brought to bear through music and TV news, suggesting a fragile political moment that mirrors the characters' own situation. The film feels all of a piece, something like a fully achieved debut.

The mix of social and political satire, dry comedy and low-key mysticism in 'The Widowed Witch' is pretty singular

Back to the present but this time a setting in rural north-eastern China, in *The Widowed Witch* directed by Cai Chengjie, a thornier, more inscrutable and arguably more ambitious object than the previous two films, by virtue of its duration, scale, deadpan tone, studied ambiguities and occasional recourse to symbolism. Erhao has just been widowed for the third time, which makes her cursed in the eyes of her local villagers. Seeking somewhere more congenial to live she sets off on an odyssey through the countryside with her dead husband's deaf brother. A series of miraculous events overturns the hostility towards her and mean she's now regarded as some kind of a shamanic figure, something she turns to her advantage. The world Cai evokes feels fully inhabited, clearly the result of deep research and knowledge, as well as his smart use of non-professionals (though the main role is played by the actress Tian Tian). Mention should be made, too, of the bleak beauty of cinematographer Jiao Feng's black-and-white imagery (in the Academy ratio), the occasional irruptions of colour suggestive of hope in this otherwise cold, opportunistic world. *The Widowed Witch* was the winner of the Tiger competition and I wouldn't argue with that; its admixture of social and political satire, dry comedy and understated mysticism is pretty singular. And as a richly imagined feminist fable about a woman turning the tables on an ugly patriarchy it certainly feels of its moment.

Tiger bait: Cai Chengjie's *The Widowed Witch*, winner of Rotterdam's main award

BERLIN

THE WORD ON THE STRASSE

Road to nowhere: Paula Beer and Franz Rogowski in Christian Petzold's *Transit*

This year's Berlin offered dictators, genocide, resurgent nationalism and clunking clichés – but at last unveiled some films of real quality

By Nick James

To open the Berlinale with a film as straightforwardly cherishable as Wes Anderson's **Isle of Dogs** (see my interview on page 22 and our review on page 63) was always going to be tricky for the programmers – how do you follow that pack of adorably tick-ridden scavengers? At first, it seemed that the usual run of middle-ranking films would cause an outbreak of critic's winter grumpiness. But then, slowly, the quality improved, and some of the best films were even shown after the opening weekend – a strange programming tactic.

First up was Lance Daly's **Black 47**, an Irish-set revenge western shown out of competition, so clichéd you could easily imagine it before you saw it. During the 1847 potato famine, tenant-farming families are starving to death because the spuds are blighted and bailiffs are tearing the roofs off their houses. Come to take his true love and family to America, Feeney (Australian James Frecheville), a fierce blue-eyed deserter from the Royal Irish Rangers, finds most of them dead. When the rest soon follow, he begins a campaign of grim payback against the perfidious Brits. Tracking him down are blond upper-class English officer Pope (Freddie Fox) and gruff Cockney army interrogator Hannah (Hugo Weaving), who's been saved from the noose for this dirty job. We don't accept, any more, that North American genocide is an excuse for genre atmosphere: should we set a lower standard for this less-visited genocide?

A genuine American-set western, **Damsel**, from the Zellner brothers (*Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter*, 2014), was desperate to dodge the familiar, but only swapped bathetic clichés for quirky post-modern ones. It used to be hard to believe that the energy level of any film could drop after Robert Pattinson left the screen, but it's true here. Pattinson plays Samuel Alabaster, an immaculate ever-hopeful naif, who is to be married to his true love, Penelope (Mia Wasikowska), and retrieves drunk Parson Henry (David Zellner) from a rubbish heap to perform the ceremony, but then we discover Samuel's position is not as it seems. Self-conscious anti-heroic, anti-macho mishaps of the sort we've been seeing in revisionist westerns for decades now provoke less mirth than the directors clearly expected.

Moving on to the costume dramas: I wish that before seeing Isabel Coixet's hopeless **The Bookshop** I had read Penelope Fitzgerald's much-admired 1978 novel – I fear the film may have ruined it for me. Traces of Fitzgerald's steely observation and bitter irony remain in the voiceover, but this tale of thwarted courage is bafflingly clumsy. Florence Green (Emily Mortimer), a war widow living on the Suffolk coast in 1959, moves into The Old House of Hardborough village and turns it into a bookshop, not knowing that the building is coveted by local aristocrat Violet Gamart (Patricia Clarkson) as the site for an arts centre. I have never understood Coixet's camera placings and framings. There's no sense of a filmic world, just a jumble of disconnected scenes. One can

Lance Daly's 'Black 47' is an Irish-set revenge western so clichéd you could easily imagine it before you saw it

James Frecheville in Lance Daly's *Black 47*

forgive a Catalan director for not getting the best out of an English cast, but there's way too much winking and gurning. The exception is Mortimer, and one wishes that the film more closely matched the quality of her portrayal, presenting naive doggedness with a wan smile.

One film I did not expect much from, but was happily sideswiped by, was Rupert Everett's **The Happy Prince**, which chronicles Oscar Wilde's last years in exile after his release from Reading Gaol. Everett has created a *film maudit*, a slightly bonkers melodrama that could be renamed *Whatever Happened to Lady Fame?* Everett vamps and roars his way through humiliation after humiliation, teeth and jaw forward, body lurching from crisis to crisis. Half the time you don't know which 1970s British TV comedian Everett's going to look like next – sometimes like Frankie Howerd, sometimes Ken Dodd. But the comic grotesquerie only enhances the sense of tragic fuck-it-all doom. There's not much evidence Everett can really direct – way too much in-your-face shaky camera – yet almost by force of camp will he's made the most startling British costume drama biopic I've seen in a while.

Aleksei German Jr's films are an altogether different acquired taste. He likes his characters to wander around vast architectural spaces in a lemony light while talking to each other as if they're quoting great literature, or at least their own diaries. The subject of **Dovlatov** is Sergei Dovlatov (superbly played by Milan Maric), a poet of the late Soviet era who was not widely read until after his death in 1990. It had me reflecting on some of the commentaries in Svetlana Alexievich's book *Second Hand Time* (2013), in which survivors of the Brezhnev era recall how central literature was to their lives and how that's all gone now. German's films are all about drift, and since we in the old West may be drifting into an era in which the arts are no longer so central to life, it could be that *Dovlatov* has its lessons for our own future.

The most perfectly realised film at Berlin was Sergei Loznitsa's **Victory Day**, a documentary in much the same vein as his *Austerlitz* (2016), which looked at tourists visiting Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. Here it's Russians flooding into Berlin to visit the Great Patriotic War memorial built by the Soviets in Treptower Park. The crowd includes nationalist biker gangs and the like, but everyone is in a great mood, singing patriotic songs, flaunting red flags and chests full of medals presumably won by their grandparents. Between 20 and 30 million Soviet citizens perished defeating Hitler – it was the Soviet army that defeated the bulk of the German army. But when you hear the crowd sing in praise of the Cossacks, you might also think of the pogroms of the 19th century or the mass rape of German women in Berlin in 1945. The great upsurge of nationalism sweeping Europe right now is represented here by people who think they're celebrating the freeing of Europe from the Nazi yoke. The ironies rebound and rebound.

Christian Petzold's **Transit** was the film I was most looking forward to. Anna Seghers's 1944 novel about doomed individuals trying to leave Marseille before German troops arrive has been given the twist of a present-day setting – a little like the theatre convention of Shakespeare in modern dress. Georg (Franz Rogowski) has obtained the papers of a famous writer he saw die and is pretending to be him in order to get a visa to Mexico, but two encounters delay him: the first, a meeting with a young boy, Driss (Lilien Batman), and his mute mother; the second a street sighting of the beautiful Marie (Paula Beer). The usual lean craftwork one expects from the director is present and I was intrigued by the film until a tricksy sequence of false endings began to irritate and just about spoiled it.

Seeing the light: Ana Brun in Marcelo Martinessi's *The Heiresses*

BERLIN TOP TEN

1. **Isle of Dogs** Wes Anderson
2. **Dovlatov** Aleksei German Jr
3. **Victory Day** Sergei Loznitsa (below)
4. **The Heiresses** Marcelo Martinessi
5. **The Green Fog** Guy Maddin
6. **Unsane** Steven Soderbergh
7. **Infinite Football** Corneliu Porumboiu
8. **Daughter of Mine** Laura Bispuri
9. **The Happy Prince** Rupert Everett
10. **Transit** Christian Petzold

Impersonation is also at the heart of Benoît Jacquot's **Eva**, based on the same James Hadley Chase novel as Joseph Losey's 1962 film. Bertrand, a care worker, steals the final manuscript of a dead writer's play and passes it off as his own, but his attempts to build on the acclaim this brings him leads to a meeting with Eva (Isabelle Huppert), a high-class prostitute. I found it tedious and one-note, though a few other critics were more enthusiastic.

My Brother's Name Is Robert and He's an Idiot begins within sight of the Alps, where a small filling station is bordered by wheatfields. Twins Elena (Julia Zange) and Robert (Josef Mattes) have returned to a familiar spot for the weekend so that Elena can revise for her university philosophy exam. Their closeness and mutual goading gives off an incestuous tension that escalates when Elena bets Robert she will lose her virginity before the exam– but to whom? This slow-burn three-hour study by Philip Gröning, maker of the superb contemplative documentary *Into Great Silence*, is full of a garden-of-Eden type reverence for nature, undercut by the symbolic presence of the filling station. It's reminiscent of Bruno Dumont's debut *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) and will test the patience of many, but it grew and grew on me – until the violence hinted at throughout arrived and made it less interesting.

One of the festival's true critical successes was Marcelo Martinessi's **The Heiresses**, a beautifully observed portrait from Paraguay of an ageing, bourgeois but debt-ridden lesbian couple. When Chiquita (Margarita Irún) has to go to jail for fraud, Chela (Ana Brun), a shy, buttoned-up homebody, is left to oversee the selling off of their possessions. Protected from the couple's slow loss of status until now, Chela finds herself, by degrees and almost inadvertently, running a taxi service for her rich friends, through which she meets Angy (Ana Ivanova), a much younger woman at ease with her sexual needs. Martinessi's film contains nuanced acting, by a cast of unknowns, and scenes of subtle revelation.

Ana Brun's one rival for the best female performance I saw is Alba Rohrwacher in

Daughter of Mine (*Figlia mia*), a small film of modest means by Laura Bispuri (*Sworn Virgin*, 2015). Set in a remote Sardinian fishing village, the film explores a familial love triangle between ten-year-old Vittoria (a remarkably assured Sara Casu), a pale, red-headed girl rejected by her schoolmates; Tina (Valeria Golino), her strict, religious mother; and wayward, desperate barfly Angelica (Rohrwacher), whose debts are driving her out of her hillside home. The true relationship between these three isn't hard to guess, and too simple to sustain the weight of melodramatic scenes here, but Rohrwacher's highly physical turn as the fun-loving-girl-gone-wrong is fiery and fascinating, and well matched by a restrained Golino.

Would that I could be as enthusiastic about Cédric Khan's **The Prayer**, which focuses on a 22-year-old boy's experiences in a strict Swiss religious retreat designed for recovering addicts. It has the virtue of taking religious belief at face value, but is full of scenes of a bogus purity, like adverts for Christianity. Angry junkie loner Thomas (Anthony Bajon) comes through the usual early tests of his character, but gets left behind on a mountain – implausibly, given that his buddies are supposed to be so caring. He is being kept away from temptation but manages to find a gorgeous girl who will sleep with him at the drop of a hat. Fairytales will come true, it seems, if you can pray the right way.

No film enchants a city more directly than Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) does San Francisco. Guy Maddin's **The Green Fog** takes as its motif that moment when Kim Novak's Judy has been forced by James Stewart's Scottie to become Madeleine again and walks into the room surrounded by a green miasma. Taking Thom Andersen's video essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003) as his model and borrowing his structure from the plot of *Vertigo*, Maddin plunders clips from San Francisco-set films and TV series to make an uncanny and often hilarious doppelganger out of actor reaction shots and cityscape inserts. It's a delirious treat. And speaking of Madeleines, Josephine Decker's **Madeline's Madeline**, a theatre-based therapeutic exploration of identity crisis, was greeted with huge enthusiasm by many of my colleagues, but its preciousness left me cold.

I was also not much moved or intrigued by Lav Diaz's melancholy allegorical musical **Season of the Devil**, though I know his cadre of cinephile devotees will put in their four hours. In a series of monochrome single-shot tableaux, singers relate tales of torture and murder perpetrated in 1979 in the remote Philippines village of Ginto by a militia armed by the literally two-faced Chairman Narciso (Noel Sto. Domingo) – who makes a brief unsubtitled appearance. (Ferdinand Marcos was in power at the time, but current leader Rodrigo Duterte is apparently as much a target). The songs, all sung a cappella, revolve around the fates of Lorena (Shaina Magdayao), a doctor who's set up a clinic in Ginto, and Hugo (Piolo Pascual), her poet husband, who's agonising back in the city. There are voices of haunting beauty, but others with a touch of *Les Misérables*.

Some leavening droll humour was on hand in Corneliu Porumboiu's documentary **Infinite Football**, in which the director interviews

Reign of terror: Andrea Berntzen in Erik Poppe's *U-July 22*

The festival catalogue says Poppe has 'dared' to make a film about the massacre, but need it have been made at all?

Laurentiu Ginghina, a government official who nurtures obsessional ideas about how football should be played. These stem, it would seem, from an appalling accident he had when playing the game himself, a mistreated broken leg that changed his life. Porumboiu draws strange thoughts from this elder brother of one of his school friends by playing dumb. My favourite moment comes when Ginghina compares his life to that of a superhero's alter ego. He's the Clark Kent of undiscovered football thinkers, maybe.

The Berlin rumour mill is never to be trusted. I heard early positive buzz on the Swedish film **The Real Estate**, directed by Axel Petersén and Måns Månsson. Petersén's *Avalon* (2011), about ageing party people trying to dodge financial catastrophe, was an underrated gem. But *The Real Estate* turns out to be an irritating, sensationalist, deliberately abrasive film about an elderly woman who inherits an apartment building but can't sell it because her nephew has filled one floor with illegal immigrants. It's meant to be drily funny but didn't succeed with the audience I saw it with. People may talk up the supposed politics of the scenario, but this deliberately arch provocation is just a pretext for a lot of crass, implausible violent posturing to terrible music.

A more directly topical political film is Norwegian Erik Poppe's **U-July 22** (*Utøya 22. Juli*), about the mass murder by the far-right extremist Anders Breivik in Norway in 2011. It puts us on the ground with the hundreds of young Norwegian Labour Party activists on the island of Utøya when the heavily armed extremist began his shooting spree. Straining throughout to be respectful, the film focuses on 19-year-old Kaja (a superb Andrea Berntzen) and, after a prologue of news footage showing the decoy bomb that went off in Olso earlier the same day, seems to play out in real time as if it were all one take. In one scene in particular, in which Kaja comforts a young girl who's been shot, the acting is astonishing. But the film takes me back to the question I asked of *Black 47*. The festival catalogue says Poppe has "dared" to make a film about the massacre, and we can be grateful that it has been done so decorously; but need it have been made at all?

Cédric Kahn's *The Prayer*

Lav Diaz's *Season of the Devil*

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Wes Anderson's latest film is a futuristic fantasy with a cast of dogs and a script that is half in Japanese. Here, Anderson and his three screenwriting partners discuss the process of creating the world of 'Isle of Dogs'

By Nick James

WHERE BEAGLES DARE

WILD ROVERS
In *Isle of Dogs*, directed by Wes Anderson (opposite), Atari (above, centre) is voiced by Koyu Rankin, while the alpha dogs – (above, left to right) Chief, King, Boss, Rex and Duke – are voiced by Bryan Cranston, Bob Balaban, Bill Murray, Edward Norton and Jeff Goldblum

In case you'd been wondering, Wes Anderson's latest film *Isle of Dogs* is not a story set on the docklands peninsula in East London, as characteristically offbeat as that sounds. Instead it's a stop-motion animation using puppets to tell a tale set in a future Japan, about one cat-lover – Mayor Kobayashi – who uses his political power to spread Snout Fever and Dog Flu across Megasaki City. Despite the efforts of a dog-loving scientist to find a serum, Kobayashi has all dogs exiled to Trash Island, a rubbish repository. The first arrival is Spots, but within six months the island has several feral packs roaming, not least a gang of alpha dogs. The adventure really begins, though, when the Mayor's ward, Atari, crash-lands a plane on the island and goes in search of Spots, with the alpha pack – Boss, King, Rex, Duke and Chief – in tow.

The second animated feature Anderson has made, after *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), *Isle of Dogs* is, if anything, even more ambitious and meticulously realised, from a director who across his nine features to date – from 1996's *Bottle Rocket* through *Rushmore* (1998), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) to his latest – has crafted such a distinctive and immediately recognisable tone and visual style that it has even inspired the creation of the 'Accidental Wes Anderson' Instagram account, to which people submit Anderson-esque images caught in real life that could have been taken from one of his films.

The interview below with *Isle of Dog*'s writing team – Wes Anderson, Jason Schwartzman, Roman Coppola and Kunichi Nomura and compered by me – took place on the day of the first press screenings at the Berlinale (see festival report, page 18) at the Academy of Arts, close to the Brandenburg Gate, and – as happens in the film itself – was introduced by a stirring display of taiko drumming.

Nick James: I heard that originally there were two ideas: a dog story and a Japanese-related story. Was that the case?

Jason Schwartzman: The thing I admire so much about working with Wes is having a feeling about something and then hunting it down and going for it. In the beginning, he said, "I've got this idea: dogs... garbage." He was describing the environment and he was saying, "There's something about this place I want to understand: who are these dogs?" Roman and I both felt the joy of trying to figure out what Wes was feeling, and to look for it with him. And yeah, there were many different versions at the beginning. How did they all come together? I don't remember each exact thing, just other things falling away.

NJ: There must have been a moment when this thing suddenly existed. That's a really strong idea, that there are these dogs and they're all leaders.

Roman Coppola: There was a setting that was decrepit and involved trash and a boy, and dogs, and then the alpha dogs idea came rather early on. Japan was the catalysing charge that gave it ignition.

NJ: Wes, this sounds like it was coalescing as a feeling as much as an intellectual idea. When was it important for you to start thinking about Japan?

Wes Anderson: I don't remember either, except that I have all the notebooks that we worked from. So I can see on page one of our first conversation, which has got to be four-and-a-half years ago, what you just described – even the names of the dogs, it's all on the first page, that whole concept of dogs on a garbage dump.

NJ: Dogs with diseases?

WA: We were immediately working with diseases.

HOUND FOR GLORY (Above right) US exchange student Tracy (voiced by Greta Gerwig) and student newspaper editor Hiroshi (Nijiro Murakami) campaign against Megasaki mayor Kobayashi, who has exiled all dogs to Trash Island (above), a place that recalls the setting of Kurosawa Akira's *Dodes'ka-Den* (1970) – one of many references to Kurosawa in *Isle of Dogs*

Fleas, ticks, lice, rats, mangy birds. That's a sentence on the first page. But we'd often talked about Japanese cinema, and somehow during the first time we spent together focusing on this story, that was what came out of it. And that's when I asked Kun [Kunichi Nomura] to get involved. Kun was there from the first hour when I went to Japan in 2003/4, and we've been friends ever since. Half of the movie turns out to be in Japanese, which none of us speak except for him.

NJ: So Kun, how did it strike you when the idea was first put to you?

Kunichi Nomura: Wes just said he wanted to make a movie based in Japan. And then, "Can you read the script?" And that I would have to translate. And then he asked me about details: what's the department store uniform from the 1960s, not from the 70s. Then coral, factories, pictures, etc.

WA: Doing research for a story like this, there are so many things that you're getting inspiration from. Nowadays we take a lot of things by just googling them. But [in Japan] you can't google them if you don't have the right keyboard. So suddenly stuff that we weren't finding, Kun was finding; you know, odd requests. Kun actually directed a lot of the performances or worked with me while we recorded actors who were speaking Japanese, and also then translated or retranslated lots of the material and helped us figure out how the story related to Japan, because in the first place it didn't.

KN: Recording was really fun. We recorded most of the dialogue through an iPhone, but we had to ask people to do it somewhere really quiet, which is not easy in Japan. So, for example, my friend Jonio [Jun Takahashi] is a designer for [fashion brand] Undercover, who do a Paris collection. He woke up in the morning and had to yell into the phone because Wes always asks everybody to speak pretty fast. So he was recording his dialogue and his wife woke up. And she was like, "What are you doing?" You know, it's noisy. So then he went outside into his car and was recording again, but then his son noticed, like, "Dad, what are you doing?"

NJ: How do you guys work writing together? Is it a tag-team thing? Are you in a room throwing things backwards and forwards?

RC: This was over four years of process, so there are different chapters. It started with a bunch of conversations, just the mood and the feeling. Wes keeps the notebook, so that when something really resonates, it'll go down in his notebook, and then we'll gather – often on a trip, we try to travel together because that's very stimulating – and we'll have our sessions and sometimes we'll just banter and chat and be circuitous, as we are now. And then something will resonate and we'll direct the conversation back into what we're trying to do. Sometimes we'll improvise a bit – sort of assume the roles of characters. We have a history because we worked together on *Darjeeling Limited*, so we'll fall into our roles, but the goal, as Jason pointed out, is that there is an idea that kind of exists, and Wes as the director has the radar tuned to that, and we're trying to find it together. It's almost like it already exists but we're just uncovering it.

WA: When Roman says roles, sometimes it is actually like a physical arrangement in the room. Roman has a tendency to go on the floor with Jason. Jason and Roman are cousins, you know, and they have a very comfortable intimacy with each other, so often they have their legs on top of each other for six hours or something. We have a very relaxed, fun way of working. We entertain each other, I think, while we're working on these stories.

NJ: Can you talk a little bit about the filmic Japanese influences that you were drawing on once you knew it was going to be set in Japan in the future.

WA: It was originally supposed to be in the future. We were seeing a futuristic city, but like a 1960s version of the future – as if Kurosawa in 1962 had done this future-movie and the opening narration said, 'The year is 2007... the city of Megasaki...' We then decided it would be like a movie set in 2007 but made in 1962, but nobody really understood what we were talking about.

NJ: It sounds pretty cinephile to me.

WA: Yes, maybe it would've been all right. Probably we made the cowardly choice to not do that.

NJ: Well, if that's a cowardly choice, what about the brave choice to have the Japanese in the film untranslated?

WA: It's almost an embarrassing thing to say, because with an animated movie you make a script where you're working. The way I do it – I've done one other animated movie – we make the script and then we start storyboarding, and I work with just one guy, Jay Clarke, and one editor, Edward Bursch, and I record all the English

PACK MENTALITY Nick James (centre) compering the Berlinale discussion with the writing team behind *Isle of Dogs*: (left to right) Jason Schwartzman, Roman Coppola, Wes Anderson, Kunichi Nomura

speaking voices. I do those parts on my iPhone, and Kun did all the Japanese voices on his iPhone – or Kun, who has a radio show, sometimes recorded in an actual sound booth. We re-did some of the things again, but Kun plays the mayor in the story because nobody could do it as well as he did it. He wasn't supposed to be in it.

NJ: Returning to the Kurosawa films, you were not necessarily going for the samurai period classics, but rather the gritty crime films he made – the city movies?

WA: The ones we talked about the most were *High and Low* [1963], *Stray Dog* [1949] and *The Bad Sleep Well* [1960]. We actually used some music from *Drunken Angel* [1948], which is a very beautiful one – it reminds me of that Visconti movie with Marcello Mastroianni that's on sets that stand in for Venice: *White Nights* [1957]. It's on a canal, but it's a polluted, garbage canal. *Drunken Angel* is all shot on sets and it has that sort of poetic vision of a gritty city. One of our things I wrote on the early pages of notes was: "Keep it poetic." We were hoping it would have something a little otherworldly about it. The other person we always talked about, along with Kurosawa, was Miyazaki [Hayao, the co-founder of Japanese animation powerhouse Studio Ghibli].

NJ: It's a particularly kind of august voice cast that you have. Do you tend to record them in groups, so they can interact, or are they all done separately?

WA: We had a group with Bill Murray and Bryan Cranston and Edward Norton and Bob Balaban. One of the first things we did was to record this sort of hero-pack together. We were in a normal, very conventional recording booth, a recording studio setting, but we had the whole group. That was a great way for us to start it.

NJ: Was that about alpha dog bonding?

WA: Yeah, and Bryan was new to the group. Everybody else knew each other; we had all worked together in one way or another before. But Bryan was new. Liev [Schreiber] was new. Liev we recorded separately.

JS: I remember hearing those initial sessions and it was like a rocket that takes off and the boosters drop off to get higher and higher and [the film] was entering the next phase of its orbit. It was really exciting to hear these characters come alive.

WA: Which is interesting, too, because it doesn't cost much. It's like the movie is happening, but it's sort of happening before you've reached the moment where you say. "We're really going to do this."

NJ: The other great thing with an animation is you're not put in a particular timeframe for a shoot, so you can add or subtract things later on. How far did you explore that?

WA: A bit less than when we did on *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, which changed and evolved a lot during the making of the film. We're talking about the two-ish years of really being in production, of animating the thing. This one was bigger. It's been made for the same budget as *Fantastic Mr. Fox* but it has three times as many characters and twice as many sets. Our idea was that all the things we learned during *Mr. Fox* about how to be efficient and economical and how our group can work together, we're gonna use those things and we'll be fine. But it was always a stretch and, you know, you say you don't have a schedule the way you do on a movie, but you really do. It's just that when you're a month over, it's equivalent to "We're going to go overtime 15 minutes on the last day." The relationship of time is different, but you're still always very aware of your resources and how you're going to get it done.

NJ: This filmmaking group is known to be one that's particularly interested in detail, and there seems to be more detail than ever in this piece. Does that create an anxiety about how you're getting it across? Is it challenging to marshal that detail so it doesn't disappear altogether?

WA: Getting the balance is just totally an instinctive thing. Sometimes there's no way around it, I'm trying to put too much in there. But what I hope is that whatever we're finding is making the experience more interesting. With this film in particular, there was a point in the process where we started doing some things very, very simply. Like a white sky without even a cloud, or, more than I've ever done, this movie has simple blue skies. It's starting to look like a Richard Avedon picture. So that is me thinking about what you're saying without quite knowing it. Sometimes it wanted silence and it wanted a kind of extreme simplicity to offset shots that are just absolutely jammed with stuff we're trying to get in there.

NJ: Kun, did you have to get involved with a lot of education of your colleagues here, in terms of the Japanese language, or culturally specific details?

KN: We went back and forth with emails. Wes would ask me questions: "Is it alright, or is there another way to say it?" And then I would reply and change maybe a line, and fix it in Japanese.

WA: Often we would have a version of a translation – sometimes we worked with a translator – but you would always say things like, "That is fine, but it doesn't sound like your movie." And you would retranslate with some different literary voice in your head.

KN: Your script has a certain texture, how you make people laugh even though it's serious dialogue, how you pick the words. So when a normal Japanese translator translates, they try to make it short, and simple. But I often find that that loses the charm of your original dialogue. That was the really hard part, because I wanted to keep the regional colour and texture of

I remember hearing those initial sessions and it was like a rocket that takes off and the boosters drop off to get higher and higher and the film was entering the next phase of its orbit

THE FLOATING WORLD
Anderson looked to Japanese woodblock art for inspiration when crafting the film's meticulously detailed world, which takes in bathhouses and theatre

FANTASY ISLAND
Wes Anderson says, 'One of the things I wrote on the early pages of notes was: "Keep it poetic." We were hoping it would have something a little otherworldly about it'

What the animators do is really mysterious to me. I'm always dazzled by it. The same animator, doing the same moment, can be utterly different from the next

the Japanese. But Wes is always asking me, "Can you make it shorter?" Like, "This is ten seconds, but can you make it in eight seconds?"

WA: When we did *Rushmore*, we used to do scenes to a stopwatch. We would work on the scene and then at a certain point when the shot was working, we would time it, and we'd always check the watch after the take. You're trying to balance the colour of the words, the flavour that you want, with trying to make it fast, because you don't want the film to be too long – you want to get the story told, and you want to try to get everything you can into it.

NJ: Are there other influences informing this process?

JS: The one thing we all share is an enthusiasm for music, or some video. We share things with each other and at times it feels like there's no rhyme or reason why. And then later we find, "Oh maybe that had something to do with it." We know each other so well that when we work together, we don't talk about how all the characters talk, but it already starts to feel like something.

RC: We appreciate a lot of the same things – culture at large, including music, short stories and different things.

WA: I remember many years ago you gave me this wonderful Japanese woodblock print of a peacock. There was in Paris this Hokusai exhibition that then went all over the place. And then in New York we went to the Met Museum, and there's the guy who's the head of the Japanese collection, the curator of Japanese art, who took us to all the archives where they have the Hokusai and the Hiroshige prints. Those were a big influence on the movie. That kind of imagery became something that we referred to all the time.

NJ: One of the things I really love in the film is that every time there's a fight you get that kind of cloud of dust, with things flying out of it, which is a cartoon convention. Is that something you like to bring in?

WA: Some of the famous ones, Chuck Jones and *Road-runner*, or Tex Avery, yeah, it could fall into that kind of category, I guess. There's a point at which you say, "OK, are we going to write this fight, or what if we just cut to a fighting cloud?" It's particularly suited to stop-motion – it really is literally just cotton wool made into a cloud that animators work with chopped-up puppets mixed into it. And, you know, it's fun to do.

NJ: I'm glad you mentioned puppets – maybe you should talk a little bit about the puppetry.

WA: We had a number of people who worked on *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Andy Gent was in charge of what they call the puppet hospital, which is the maintenance of the puppets. A company in or near Manchester, Mackinnon & Saunders, made the puppets for us. Andy was in charge of maintaining them and making some smaller-scale puppets. With this movie we thought we would do the whole thing in-house. We had a huge number of puppets to make, and we just thought we'd do it all right there. So Andy really took it on. I expect that this is double the size of anything he has been called upon to do before, but he is a wonderfully talented puppetmaker. The design process is complicated because for the human puppets we did something different from *Mr. Fox*. We used replacement faces. They're cast. Most of them are made of resin, and you swap the face in between the frames to change the expression. My original goal was to keep it extremely simple and not have many, but it grew and it grew – there's like 30 for a puppet.

NJ: Atari, for instance.

WA: Atari probably had 30 faces. Sometimes the mouth gets replaced, and sometimes the whole face. The dogs, on the other hand, are different. The bodies all have a metal armature – I want to say titanium, but anyway, strong, a strong steel or maybe titanium armature. And they have a more complex set of little palettes. The faces are filled with bones, the cheekbones can push down and move up. To animate expression in something that little is a very complicated thing.

We had a number of favourite animators from *Fantastic Mr. Fox* – Jason Stalman, Kim Keukeleire, people who we'd worked with for years. There aren't that many people who still even know about this craft, much less people who are masters of it. What they do is really mysterious to me. I've spent a lot of time doing this, but I know nothing about how they take the recording. You have steps figuring out together what it wants to be, but ultimately there's this part of it where now the person is really doing the take, and it's like they're dealing with too much information for you to quite be able to break it down. So it's more like the muscle memory of some great guitar player or something in ultra-slow motion. I'm always dazzled by it. The same animator, doing the same moment, can be utterly different from the next. Someone like Jason or Kim, what they can do with the face of one of these dogs is quite a unique thing. It's wonderful to watch.

***Isle of Dogs* is released in UK cinemas on 30 March and is reviewed on page 63**

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RED EARTH

A gripping outback western set in the 1920s, Warwick Thornton's 'Sweet Country' exposes the racism and brutality at the heart of the colonial project, as a posse hunts down a pair of Indigenous Australians accused of murder

By Trevor Johnston

He may be sporting his trademark black baseball cap during the interview, but the image of a cricket bat crops up several times in the course of a conversation with Indigenous Australian filmmaker Warwick Thornton. Or more precisely, a cricket bat metaphorically thwacking the audience on the head to get a narrative point across. As his bracing new feature *Sweet Country*, an Aussie western with a potent historical revisionist agenda, heads on its international roll-out, Thornton evidently has an uncompromising message to get across, yet he's also definitely wary of alienating a potential global audience.

"This is the first time we've had a voice to make a film about a certain part of Australian history," says the Alice Springs native, who shot to cinephile prominence when his slice-of-life debut *Samson & Delilah* won the Cannes Camera d'Or in 2009. "I do desperately need to tell the truth about what our people have seen, but as budget levels rise that's something which is more and more of a challenge. You're definitely under pressure to turn out something more palatable to get bums on

RUNNING SCARED
In *Sweet Country*, Natassia Gorey-Furber and Hamilton Morris play Lizzie and Sam Kelly, who are on the run from a posse of white men as chief suspects in a murder

THE ACT OF KILLING
In *Sweet Country*, set amid a community of white settlers who have co-opted the Indigenous locals as unpaid farm workers in Central Australia (below), Philomac (above – the character is played in different scenes by twins Tremayne and Trevon Doolan) is the key witness to the murder of a white man

seats to cover your costs. But I have to say I'm not the kind of filmmaker who goes around waving a cricket bat at the audience. There's definitely a balance to be found between the truth and the financial realities of the industry."

That much certainly comes across in *Sweet Country*, a film judicious, excoriating and involving. The baking sun and red earth of Central Australia define the landscape, where, in the aftermath of World War I, white settlers have moved in, co-opting the Indigenous locals as unpaid farm workers. Some of the new owners, such as god-fearing Sam Neill, treat them with a degree of decency, but the latest blow-in, Ewen Leslie's boozy, racist ex-soldier Harry – a man with a grudge against the world after traumatic service on the Western Front – is clearly bad news. His request to borrow Neill's stockman and his wife – played by Indigenous non-professionals Hamilton Morris and Natassia Gorey-Furber – sets in motion

a chain of events including sexual abuse and a shooting in self-defence. As Leslie lies dead in the dirt, the two Indigenous Australians flee for their lives into the inhospitable outback, chief suspects in the murder of a white man, and soon tracked by Bryan Brown's police sergeant heading a posse. Thereafter, with brutal daytime temperatures and unforgiving surroundings, survival becomes as much a priority for pursuers and pursued as the slim prospect of justice.

It's the sort of sinewy saga you could easily imagine played out in the American West, which certainly makes the movie a saleable proposition, assisted by the presence of two of the Antipodes' perennial marquee draws in Messrs Neill and Brown (both terrific, as ever). However, underlying the fairly familiar narrative thread is an ongoing reflection on the fundamentals of Australian identity. Implicit here is the colonists' unchecked assumption that they have ownership rights over all they see, as opposed to the Indigenous community's profound sense of dispossession, exacerbated by the increasing obliteration of their own cultural traditions in the process. Thornton doesn't need any grandstanding speechifying to bring this out, you just have to look at the faces, resilient yet somehow careworn, of his Indigenous cast, to sense the traces of history etched therein. Hence this ostensibly historical drama reads as a contribution to today's very live questions about Australian selfhood – where the majority's cherished talismen, including the Southern Cross, (the five-star constellation that appears on the Australian flag) and the annual Australia Day celebrations, are now being reassessed in the light of associations with a toxic past.

"There are points of view throughout the movie about how history is working today, let alone in the past," maintains Thornton, who since the film's Venice film festival premiere has also released a feature doc back in Australia, titled *We Don't Need a Map*, which assesses the meaning of the Southern Cross through a varied spectrum of cultural and ethnic associations. "That sense of land-grab nationalism is still very much with us. The whole idea of borders, of shutting yourself in to become somehow more self-important, is something that seems almost pandemic at the moment, not just in Australia. It's part of the whole Brexit thing as well, right? So it's up to filmmakers, musicians, artists and so on, to raise awareness, and help us make better choices in the future."

For all the forthrightness of Thornton's views, however, it's worth noting that *Sweet Country* itself, quite aside from the compelling undertow of its central pursuit, is rich enough to prove understanding of individuals on all sides of the argument – an element which was still developing in mid-shoot. The genesis of the script was actually with Thornton's regular sound recordist David Tranter – someone he's known since they were six years old in Alice Springs – who'd had an idea of writing something about his grandfather. Unlike many such notions bandied about between film crew members, he actually came up with the goods, before co-screenwriter Steven McGregor worked the material into a more defined western-style template.

"Great structure, great turning points, but it was a little like an early John Ford film with white hats, black hats and no crossover between them," Thornton says. "It really started to get interesting during pre-production

and even the shoot, when Steven and myself would be writing in flashbacks and flash-forwards. The characters' memories, dreams and nightmares, which enable us to get inside everybody's heads. That's the stuff which has the viewer asking, 'Where are we? When is this?' Not knowing the immediate answers is just as powerful as certainty, because it keeps the audience on their toes, and gives you a context for why nasty people do very bad things."

In person, Thornton is amiably blokey, and often self-deprecating, but beneath the veneer of not taking it all too seriously, there's of course evident craft and dedication. You sense he probably keeps his producers on their toes too, since he prefers to work really quickly and can pack in extra stuff he's just come up with. "We managed about 25 different scenes which weren't in the original script," he says. "Nineteen of them turned out to be shit, but we got six really great moments still in the movie." By the same token, there's no doubt that his work with his non-professional Indigenous cast is a real foundation for what we see. In *Samson & Delilah*, for instance, newcomers Rowan McNamara and Marissa Gibson were heartrending as the ill-fated young couple, while in *Sweet Country*, fugitive Hamilton Morris's stoically grounded, seemingly innate sense of calm brings palpable gravitas to the story, and the resplendently bearded Gibson John is soulfulness personified as the elderly stockman living day by day with the ache of being separated from his tribal roots. How is it then that Thornton gets people with no prior acting experience to come across with such an imposing screen presence?

"I'm a great believer that there's no such thing as a bad actor, just bad directors. Don't cast someone in a role they can't play. That's your fault, not theirs. For me, I read the script and get a picture in my mind, then when I meet that face, we're on. It all starts with breaking down shyness, with fostering absolute confidence in them as human beings before you get anywhere near the set or even discussing a script and characters. Every actor has that moment when they look in the mirror and say to themselves, 'I can stand in front of a camera.' It's a turning point. It's empowering. It's a beautiful thing. And my job as the director is to help a non-professional get to that moment."

And for this project, was he casting in Central Australia, where the story's set? "Absolutely. Hamilton, Natassia, Gibson, they're from that place. That's where their families are. They're from the tribes, so the history lessons we're dealing with here, their people have been through that. There's a real connection to the material, which you don't find too often when you're making a film, and that helped with the whole empowerment process I was just talking about. This is your family's story, it's really important we tell it. And the actors were totally up for that."

No one wants to make a movie about some indigenous rebel fighter, but if I wanted to do the Ned Kelly story I'd have a pile of money in front of me tomorrow

Thornton's own family background – his mother Freda Glynn was the director of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, in whose radio station her son started out before the filmmaking bug bit hard – has certainly prepared him for a life of involvement in various Indigenous causes, and it's significant that in the period between *Samson & Delilah* and *Sweet Country*, he put his cinematographer's hat on and shot both the three-part landmark TV series *Art+Soul* (2010) on Indigenous Australian artists, as well as his mate Wayne Blair's show-stopping musical drama *The Sapphires* (2012), about an Aboriginal 60s girl group. That sense of being one of the contributors to a wider and continuing project of cultural reclamation is clearly something which matters to him, though the way he tells it, there's clearly a long way to go.

"There's a lot of Indigenous people throughout the history of Australia, who fought through massacres, who stood up for their rights, who battled against their land being stolen and their people enslaved. We don't know their names because they're not in the school textbooks. And yet Ned Kelly, the *loveable* bush ranger, the Irishman who fought the empire and kicked against the pricks, is put on the highest pedestal. That's why I made a point in *Sweet Country* of putting in the townsfolk watching the early silent feature about the Kelly gang – our country's claim to cinematic fame, allegedly the first silent feature – and cheering on Ned Kelly, the night before they're screaming for the hanging of a black guy called Sam Kelly. It's hypocritical, you have to call it out, but that's where we are. No one wants to make a movie about some Indigenous rebel fighter whose name is lost to history, but if I wanted to do the Ned Kelly story I'd have a pile of money in front of me tomorrow."

Indeed, the trial scene he just alluded to shows how, even at this 1920s juncture, precepts of legal equality are embedded in the statute book, but the racist prejudices of popular white opinion remain stubbornly ingrained elsewhere. If that was then, what's his own experience of the here and now?

"In a strange way, what you actually see in the movie is where Australia is today. Nationalism's getting really, really dark. There's the fear of the other, of the foreigner, of the future. On the other hand, I grew up being called 'You little coon' – just out and out racism straight to your face. Nowadays that sort of stuff isn't tolerated publicly, so it's internalised. It's there, it's just not open.

"For someone like myself," he continues, "it's all about the fire you have inside. It's not anger, it's not love, it's a sense that it's vitally important to talk about this stuff. If you're smart enough, you can play with a lot of social issues and still be entertaining. You can find that balance and still tell the truth. Indigenous filmmakers, not only in Australia, now have a voice and the world is listening, because people want to hear a different opinion on the past, the present, and maybe even the future. Actually, I'm waiting for some Indigenous director to make a really kickin' sci-fi flick. That's something I really want to see!"

***Sweet Country* is released in UK cinemas on 9 March and is reviewed on page 76**

HEAT AND DUST
Warwick Thornton's first fiction feature, *Samson & Delilah*, the tale of a tragic love affair between two Indigenous Australian teenagers, won the Camera d'Or at Cannes in 2009

KILLER JOE

'You Were Never Really Here', a New York-set thriller about an ex-Marine trying to free a teenager from a sex-trafficking ring, might not seem an instant choice for director Lynne Ramsay – but strip away the genre trappings and its focused study of a character on the edge suddenly becomes a much closer fit with the rest of her work

By Leigh Singer

Lynne Ramsay's first feature in six years, *You Were Never Really Here*, begins with a black screen and keening industrial thrum, before pitching into claustrophobic underwater darkness and the hushed tones of a female voice counting down. We subsequently learn that this mantra-like reckoning, by an adolescent girl, is her way of keeping focus, and sanity, amid horrific trauma.

The girl, Nina, isn't the film's protagonist – that would be Joe, the suicidal ex-Marine enforcer, hired by Nina's senator father to rescue her from a sex-trafficking ring. So aside from being a typically bold, elliptical, immersive flourish, it's tempting, given Ramsay's own repeated professional tribulations, to read something more personal into this opening: a woman in limbo, steeling herself, biding her time, and now ready to resurface.

Astonishingly, the lengthy gap between this film and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2010) is less than the nine-year chasm between *Kevin* and *Morvern Callar* (2001). Factor in her 1999 debut *Ratcatcher* and that's just four features in almost 20 years. In the same timeframe, Ken Loach has made 13 films; Danny Boyle, 11,

SLAVES OF NEW YORK
In *You Were Never Really Here* Joaquin Phoenix plays Joe, a suicidal ex-Marine tasked with tracking down Nina, a politician's teenage daughter (played by Ekaterina Samsonov) who has been abducted

plus London's 2012 Olympics extravaganza; even the painstaking Mike Leigh, including his upcoming *Peterloo*, totals seven.

Painfully aborted projects – more on these later – have certainly loomed large in Ramsay's extended absences. And suspicions naturally arise about the film industry's woefully entrenched gender imbalance. Watching the ensuing rise of other fiercely independent, idiosyncratic female British directors, such as Andrea Arnold or Clio Barnard, you'd be forgiven for sometimes wondering if Ramsay herself were ever really here, save for the lingering, indelible impressions made by her slim filmography.

Meeting Ramsay in a crowded West London bistro, her demeanour is, unlike her pulsing, restless films, relaxed and centred. There's no obvious impatience, nor overt sense of bitterness at lost time or opportunities. Rather she exudes, with her lilting Glaswegian accent, a matter-of-fact honesty about past problems, alongside a low-key, palpable mix of relief and excitement at the way in which *You Were Never Really Here*'s rapid genesis has re-energised her career.

Ramsay says she initially read Jonathan Ames's urban neo-*noir* novella "in a couple of hours – it's a real page-turner". Yet she hadn't fully finished the screenplay when she arrived in New York from her bolthole on the Greek island of Santorini, for a rapid-fire 29-day shoot in a window made possible by the sudden availability of lead actor Joaquin Phoenix.

"I'd love to have a 75-day shoot," she says. "*Kevin* was also pretty mental, that was 30 days. But I think this film suited total chaos. It's a bit like when you're jamming or something, it was totally made on instinct. You have to just go with your feelings and your thoughts very quickly and trust that."

Ramsay's instincts, in close collaboration with Phoenix, led her to cut 19 pages from an already lean script, including gutting and recalibrating the entire third act. Some of this was down to the cost of New York locations. "You become a bit of a producer yourself in a strange way," she says. "The financiers were saying, 'Can you do it in London?' – but it's a very New York kind of story."

But there's also a strong sense of a deeper, less practical response at work. "The energy of the summer and the oppressive heat and the sweat and the sound of that city – there was a feeling of some kind of electricity over it," she recalls. "Something that was about to burst or explode."

THE KILLING KIND
Director Lynne Ramsay on the set of *You Were Never Really Here* with Joaquin Phoenix (above), an ex-Marine who is haunted by memories of a brutal father and who still lives with his mother, played by Judith Roberts (below)

After such an intense shoot, Ramsay hoped that post-production would be somewhat more relaxed. Instead, deep in the edit, she received an invitation from the Cannes Film Festival which had viewed a rough cut that still contained storyboards.

"I might be the only person to hear, 'You're in the Competition' and think, 'Oh my God'," Ramsay says, smiling. "We shot some stuff in the few weeks before Cannes and the [print] didn't have end credits. I thought, 'OK, I'll go, but it's not finished and I'll have more cutting time.'"

The film premiered during Cannes 2017's final weekend, quickly garnering some of the festival's best reviews, and went on to win Ramsay a share in the Best Screenplay award (which was given jointly to Yorgos Lanthimos for *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*) and Best Actor for Phoenix. "Of course everybody loves it at Cannes and it's like, 'Don't change it!' So I slightly shot myself in the foot a bit..."

Ramsay is no stranger to acclaim or awards. She studied at the National Film and Television School and her graduation film *Small Deaths* won the 1996 Jury Prize for Best Short Film at Cannes (a feat she repeated with her third short, *Gasman*). Another short, *Swimmer*, won a Bafta in 2013. All these, plus her three previous features, stand out as intimate, impressionistic, largely domestic tales of individuals and families grappling with guilt and loss.

Ames's brisk and brutal revenge thriller, then, seems initially to be a clean break, owing more to the action heroics of, say, Charles Bronson or, latterly, Liam Neeson. Ramsay laughs, clearly taken with *Taken* comparisons,

A lot of people were quite surprised I was doing this, but what drew me in was the character Joe. It's the antithesis of all those movies with indestructible guys. This is a very fallible man

though she's never seen Neeson's franchise and has very different B-movie comparisons in mind.

"My mum and dad were big film buffs: *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, that kind of stuff, Hitchcock. I love genre – Sam Fuller, he really subverts stuff. A lot of people were quite surprised I was doing this, but what drew me in was the character Joe, this middle-aged guy. He's scarred up, suicidal in this kind of blackly comic way and he lives with his mum. So it's the antithesis of all those movies you're talking about, the indestructible guys. This is a very fallible man."

In fact, given its sweaty, grimy New York locale and violent avenger who, despite good intentions, still ends up getting in over his head, wouldn't a better analogy be Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976)? "I was in France recently," Ramsay says, "and they've really picked up on that. I mean, *Taxi Driver* is amazing but when I'm making films I don't really think about other films like that. And whatever I do, it ends up going somewhere else."

True enough. Ramsay's last three films all come from lauded books, each dramatically reworked. Alan Warner's first-person *Morvern Callar* narration is rendered through Samantha Morton's hypnotic, often wordless performance. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the device employed by Lionel Shriver in her novel of using letters from one divorced parent to another after their son commits a high-school massacre, fractures into Tilda Swinton's solo, non-linear, expressionist waking nightmare, her husband and young daughter now also victims of Kevin's – and Ramsay's – merciless endgame.

"I've been really upfront with writers if I'm adapting their books that I'm going to do that," she says. "And luckily they saw [the films] more as companion pieces, rather than exactly like what they've done, and been excited by it." Shriver, for example, called Ramsay's adaptation of *Kevin* "terrific".

Strip away its genre trappings, however, and *You Were Never Really Here* suddenly seems closer to home for Ramsay than one might imagine. Again she burrows deep within a central character, turning physical surroundings into a psychological landscape and evoking an emotional state, often without them having – or even being able – to articulate a word. Joe, reliving the horrors he's seen in Gulf War combat and on FBI duty, as well as childhood beatings by a violent father, recalls Swinton's shell-shocked Eva; both suffer from shards of memory that re-emerge unbidden to knife at their conscious minds.

Ramsay has an uncanny ability to introduce such psychic jolts and eruptions into her narratives and her layering of sound – effects, dialogue, music – simultaneously orientate and discombobulate. Here, for the first time, she's working with Radiohead virtuoso Jonny Greenwood, whose shape-shifting score switches between 70s funk, 80s synthesisers, pulsing electronica and avant-garde orchestration. It's all the more extraordinary how the music fits and reflects what's on screen, given that Greenwood apparently doesn't write to edited scenes.

"In the beginning the music really moves the film along," Ramsay says. "And then it starts to break down and implode and goes somewhere completely different. It kind of tracked the character and became a character in itself."

Greenwood's work is sublime, but Ramsay has long utilised pop music's potency in antagonistic ways. Think of how Nancy Sinatra's swooning 'Some Velvet Morning' in *Morvern Callar*, or Buddy Holly's chipper 'Everyday' in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, assume more foreboding connotations. Or how *Gasman* repurposes sentimental 70s Christmas hits to mark a young girl's destabilising insights into her father.

Two similar sequences stand out here: the multiple CCTV-shot depiction of Joe's raid on a brothel, scored to a similarly cut-up rendition of Rosie & the Originals' doo-wop ballad 'Angel Baby'; and a queasily funny, macabre exchange between killer and dying victim, singing along to the radio playing Charlene's kitsch ballad 'I've Never Been To Me'.

"'Angel Baby' was a strange one," Ramsay explains. "I love the song. And I watched a lot of stuff on YouTube; that's where the surveillance camera idea started coming in. We cut bars out of the music, as if you'd just jumped in space and time, which you had. Plus, I've got half a day to shoot this, I can't do a big balletic *Old Boy* sequence anyway."

As for Charlene, blame – or commend – Ramsay's father, who apparently used to be a fan. "I always thought it was hilarious because my Dad worked in a shipyard and was quite a macho guy loving this song that's essentially about a prostitute," she says. Once again, though, it's how Ramsay and her actors play the scene that's both touching and eerie.

These are stunning flashes of pure cinema, but it's hard to catch Ramsay self-promoting. I read out a tweet, found in that morning's feed, from US indie producer Ted Hope, with the suggestion that it encapsulates her own process: "No offence to all the great writers but a common mistake that filmmakers make is that they shoot the script rather than direct the film." She thinks it over quietly for a few seconds, before responding, "That's a brilliant quote."

It's also highly apt. In some ways, Ramsay is even more ruthless with Ames's *You Were Never Really Here* than with her previous adaptations, in style as well as content. Not only does the screen version add an entirely new resolution, it deliberately subverts novella and protagonist.

"It's something Joaquin and I talked about a lot," she says. "He's got a real feminine side and he was talking about getting away from those characters that tick all the boxes. And so it was a mission of ours that [Joe] should fail. It shouldn't all be wrapped up with a bow. And maybe by the end it's the girl who's driving things more than he is."

Phoenix's unvarnished, brutally internalised performance has a savage fragility reminiscent of his role in Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* (2012). Ramsay calls him her "kindred spirit". "He would never do the same thing twice, he was entirely exciting to work with. We talked about trying to make something really exciting and compulsive and intense but at the same time to strip everything back. In the book [Joe has] latex gloves and a phone jammer, and Joaquin was like, 'This is all bullshit.' And the prop guy was like, 'Oh my God!' I just think with him coming in so early and building the character, the scars, [Joe] was coming to life before my eyes with such an energy."

Yet for all Phoenix's unique abilities, the actor clearly fits with Ramsay's more unconventional casting choices. "I've worked with some amazing actors,"

I feel super-creative at the moment. I've had some bad experiences, but I feel like I'm at the top of my game, or I'm getting there. I just love making movies

she says. "Samantha Morton, Tilda Swinton, John C. Reilly. I've always gravitated towards actors who are coming in at it from a different angle. But [Joaquin], in particular, was always questioning, always digging deeper, sometimes driving me crazy, and we tried to smash up anything that felt like a cliché. It's all about the work, not the bullshit around it. And that's where I'm happy."

Encouraged by Phoenix, then, the revised finale commendably gives Nina (played by hypnotic newcomer Ekaterina Samsonov) greater agency than the book's cipher-like 'Lisa' – though one effect of this change was that Alessandro Nivola's role as her father was effectively cut to a blink-and-miss-it cameo he presumably didn't sign up for.

"I felt a bit bad about that because he's a great actor," says Ramsay ruefully. "But one thing we cut was a big confrontation scene [he was set to feature in], a bit like in the book, that I never liked. It felt it was trying to join all the dots not very successfully. And the world at the moment is very much like that: there's no black and white, no easy answer or redemptive thing. So what if you defy all those conventions?"

The result is a fascinating upending of traditional heroic, or even anti-heroic journeys, where, in Ramsay's words, "instead of having this big set piece about vengeance, it was about impotence". In the current climate of #MeToo and #Time'sUp, it's strangely fitting that practical necessity, instinctive artistry and shifting sociopolitical developments all coalesce here, yet never feel that they've been tailored to gain convenient cultural brownie points.

Such discussion inevitably means we need to talk about Harvey, and Ramsay's own relatively minor brushes with Weinstein's, in her words, "untouchable power". "He wanted to see *Kevin* before Cannes," she remembers. "Saying no to him, I'm sure he was offended and I was a bit nervous. Because you know if you piss this guy off, he could affect your career. I heard stories from filmmakers whose films were recut or bought and shelved."

Recognising that "it's definitely not an even playing field yet", Ramsay welcomes the film industry's current drive to rectify its longstanding sexism. She cites *You Were Never Really Here*'s young crew – "pretty equal, with more female gaffers" – as inspirational. Yet she's reluctant to ascribe her gender as the governing reason for why two high-profile projects imploded. "Who knows?" she says. "Because I try to make things that I really believe in, you're seen as uncompromising."

Ramsay was originally hired to adapt Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones*, famously narrated by its dead girl protagonist from the afterlife. "There was no heaven in [my version]," she explains. "It was a bit like *Hamlet*, in that the dad was having a breakdown and imagines her." As the book became a global phenomenon, her radical vision was clearly less and less commercially desirable.

"I remember that people were talking about 'lovely money' and winning Oscars," she says, wincing. She departed the project and eventually Peter Jackson, fresh from the success of his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, took over. His big-budget, much more faithful adaptation received mixed reviews. Ramsay still hasn't seen it.

Neither has she watched 2015 revisionist western *Jane Got a Gun*, which she left just before shooting began. Sidestepping specifics and the whole legal fallout, Ramsay again cites imposed script changes, rising budgets and a fear of losing final cut. This experience is clearly still raw and the word she uses, more than once and for both experiences, is "heartbreaking", particularly given her extensive preparation.

"I cast every single extra myself," she says, sighing. "When you've done everything so precisely – I love the details of things – you're walking away from your own world you've created. It was super-painful but instead of going into a black hole with it, I was trying to take the positives. I'd learned so much, and I just felt like I was bursting to make a movie. And maybe some of that energy went into this, and made it what it is."

Hearing this makes more sense of Ramsay's claim that, for a film centred on a loner with a death wish, she sees it as "a Lazarus story". Joe's mission to save Nina effectively resurrects him and it's no exaggeration to claim the film and its genesis had a similar effect on her filmmaking.

"It's nice when you make a film and talk about it, but where I'm at in my head is the next one," she admits. Her partner and three-year-old daughter wander past, a cue prompting a pledge that it won't be six, let alone nine, years before her next feature. "My daughter's going to be five in two years," she says, laughing, "so I've only got two more years to be free before school!"

Potential projects sound fascinating and diverse; she's mentioned before a sci-fi idea that, thematically, is '*Moby Dick* in space' and has even cut a trailer from found footage with a sound designer. There's another based on her four-year stint in Santorini which she calls "sort of a screwed-up *Shirley Valentine*, but funny". And, given the pleasure of watching things through the eyes of her daughter, maybe even a kids' movie.

"I feel super-creative at the moment," she says. "I've had some bad experiences and that was a knock, but I feel like I'm at the top of my game, or I'm getting there. I just love making movies. So just go with the energy and the creative spirit of how this one worked out, because it was such a buzz and a high, you know?"

***You Were Never Really Here* is released in UK cinemas on 9 March and is reviewed on page 80**

OUT OF THE PAST
Lynne Ramsay's three previous features are (below, from left) *Ratcatcher* (1999), starring William Eadie; *Morvern Callar* (2001), with Samantha Morton; and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2010), with Tilda Swinton and Jasper Newell

YAKUSHO KÔJI

FUKUYAMA MASAHARU

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PLAYING TO THE GALLERY

Swedish director Ruben Ostlund's latest spectacle of social embarrassment and abjection, 'The Square', takes aim at the pretensions of the art world, in its mischievous portrayal of a suave Stockholm gallery director who singularly fails to live up to his own high ideals

By Jonathan Romney

Hans Ulrich Obrist, artistic director of London's Serpentine Galleries, likes to start every day by spending 15 minutes reading the work of the Martinican poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant, according to a 2015 interview in the *Observer*. Glissant's works, he explains, "engage with globalisation without falling into the trap of homogenisation" and provide inspiration on the question of how to "develop exhibitions that embrace mondiality, which don't lead to separation but to dialogue". After that, Obrist goes running.

Obrist may well be consciously, even ironically, selling himself here as a paragon of intellectual glamour, wrangling with the agonies of praxis even before his breakfast bowl of quinoa crunch, but this passage comes unfailingly to mind when watching *The Square*, the new film by Swedish writer-director Ruben Ostlund. Frequenters of the modern gallery circuit may sometimes find themselves wondering what that world's reigning deities, its superstar curators, actually do in their spare time – indeed, whether they ever descend from the lofty realms of conceptual thought to undertake ordinary human pursuits.

Obrist's account of his mornings gives one answer; Ostlund's film provides another. The antihero of *The Square* is Christian (a priceless performance by Danish actor Claes Bang, who oscillates between suavity and vulnerable fluster), a very Obristian figure: a modish, dapper, impeccably high-minded and socially responsible director of a modern art gallery in Stockholm, the X-Royal (in fact a version, especially modified for the film, of that city's actual Royal Palace). But what Christian does, both on duty and in his private life, is comically unglamorous. Perpetually anxious beneath his aura of cerebral confidence, he finds himself helplessly struggling to explain his own intractably obscure catalogue notes. He sleeps with a journalist (Elisabeth Moss) but proves as tongue-tied as an adolescent when she quizzes him on his feelings and motivations, accusing him of using his prestigious position as a seduction tool. Then, launching into a misguided quest for retribution after being forced to pay a ransom to get his mobile phone back after it is stolen, Christian ends up riffling desperately through a mountain of rubbish in an attempt to find the document that might get him out of a compromising corner.

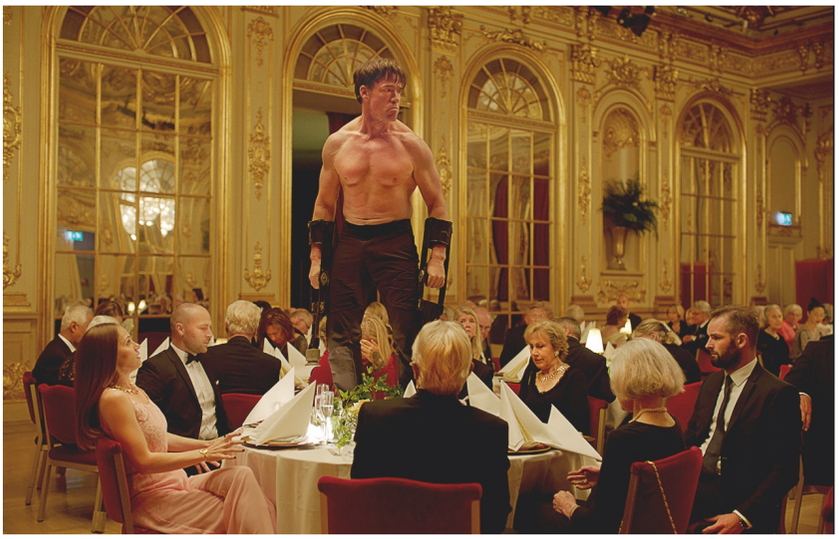
The Square, which won the Palme d'Or in Cannes last May and now has an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film, is the latest comedy-drama from a filmmaker specialising in prickly spectacles of social embarrassment and abjection. Starting with his first fiction feature *The Guitar Mongoloid* (2004), an episodic survey of the follies and caprices of assorted Gothenburg residents, Ostlund has mapped his characters' unease in navigating the paradoxical maze of moral codes and approved behaviour. *Involuntary* (2008) was another ensemble piece about people behaving recklessly against their own best interests; *Play* (2011) a forensically detached study of a case of teenage bullying, filmed in long takes in a style evoking CCTV surveillance. Ostlund's breakthrough film as an auteur name was *Force Majeure* (2014), in which a middle-class husband and father finds his self-image – indeed, his very being as a social animal – crumbling after a moment of instinctive panic in which he runs to save his own skin during an avalanche (a brilliantly filmed single-take sequence that overnight became a mandatory discussion piece on film studies courses).

The Square is Ostlund's most elaborate film to date; it's also, in its portrayal of a world of deceptive surfaces, his most glamorous. It aims for novelistic density, laying out its ethical and intellectual stakes in elaborately staged scenes, sometimes with deadpan visual humour (as in a gallery cleaner's unwitting destruction of a minimalist installation), sometimes to spectacular and confrontational effect. Take the show-stopping episode in which pampered guests at a fund-raising gala – 90 per cent of them played by actual gallerists and art patrons – are terrorised by a performance artist taking his ape impersonation too far for comfort.

The scene is a *tour de force* for American actor Terry Notary, a specialist in motion-capture performance more usually seen in blockbusters such as the recent *Planet of the Apes* films and *Kong: Skull Island* (2017). *The Square* is Ostlund's first film to feature English-language dialogue, along with Swedish, as well as internationally known faces: together with Notary and Moss, it features Dominic West as a Julian Schnabel-like celebrity artist in pyjamas. None of this was a plot for funding, Ostlund told me when he visited London last October: US co-producer Imperative Entertainment was involved already. Even so, Ostlund adds, the inclusion of familiar faces didn't harm the film's chances of getting into Competition in Cannes. "You have to be speculative, you have to understand the game of that arena," he says with a knowing chuckle. "Someone has to walk the red carpet."

The knowingness – even calculation – of *The Square* adds considerably to the film's appeal as a self-reflexive essay on the temptations and contra-

GORILLA TACTICS
In *The Square* Claes Bang (below) plays the antihero Christian, a smug, high-minded director of a modern art gallery; and Terry Notary (right) plays a performance artist who terrorises guests at a fund-raising gala with his ape impersonation



dictions of today's cultural industry, in which Ostlund too is a cog. I ask him whether there's a danger of adopting a stance of moral superiority in pointing an accusatory finger at *The Square*'s privileged, self-deluding gallery types. No, he replies; through the figure of Christian, Ostlund is inescapably implicating himself, as well as his viewers, in the critique.

"I don't think I'm pointing at other people, I'm pointing at the academic middle class that I'm part of. Many of the scenes were made with the goal of, 'We'll have a film in Competition in Cannes – we'll have an audience sitting there in tuxedos, looking at this guy in a tuxedo digging in the trash.' I always try to use the movies as a mirror of myself and of the social group that I belong to."

Ostlund's film might easily appear over-glossy by European art-cinema standards, or self-indulgent in its satirical attempt to dismantle a whole panoply of contemporary cultural, political and ethical dilemmas: at 140 minutes, *The Square* feels more like a rectangle. Still, it's a relishably scabrous entertainment, and entirely a film of the moment.

'The Square' of the title is a work of installation art showing at Christian's museum – an arbitrarily demarcated patch of space within which members of the public are asked to behave responsibly, generously, considerately towards each other. To quote the explanatory rubric accompanying the piece, "The Square is a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within it we all share equal rights and obligations." Offering this work to the public, Christian implicitly presents himself as a virtuous arbiter of altruistic behaviour and universal compassion. He talks (and clearly believes) the good talk, yet in his daily practice, he can't live up to the ideal. When his mobile phone is stolen, during a cleverly staged street scam that's a performance piece in its own right, Christian tries to get it back, using coercive scare methods to flush out the perpetrators; then he finds that someone he's accused of the crime, a young boy from an immigrant family, is fiercely determined to clear himself of the charge.

Watching Ostlund's mischievous film, you might assume that he was encouraging us to laugh at the vaporous-seeming 'random-acts-of-kindness' ethos of 'The Square' installation. In fact 'The Square' was originally a project that Ostlund himself staged in Sweden in 2015, in collaboration with film producer Kalle Boman.

I don't think I'm pointing a finger at other people. I always try to use the movies as a mirror of myself and of the social group that I belong to

"I also had a problem with the content of 'The Square'," he says, "because it's so general – like, beautiful, nice topics. But in the end I had to leave this idea that I always had to provoke, and just say, 'This is a good idea. If a society in a city decides to build a square with these values, and we spread the information, in some way it will affect our attitudes.' I never thought of it ironically."

The intention, he says, was to create a symbolic space which affects people's behaviour in real ways – rather like a zebra crossing. "With a couple of lines in the street, we have created a super-strong agreement, by which drivers should be careful with pedestrians. The idea was to create a new symbolic place that asks, 'What kind of fellow human beings are we? How do we look at each other? Do we place trust in each other? Do we take care of each other?', instead of going into a political debate about left and right and who we should vote for." By all accounts, the installation of 'The Square' in the town of Värnamo didn't encourage an overnight flourishing of altruism, but it did become a very popular meeting point.

The Square is Ostlund's second film to focus on privileged upper-middle-class males facing the painful exposure of their own flaws. In both cases, the narrative involves characters responding to crisis in a primal, instinctive manner – whether fleeing danger in *Force Majeure* or going into a form of panicked flight mode like the museum guests scared witless by the apeman performer and failing to come to the aid of his hapless victims. *The Square* is informed by questions raised by classic social experiments on freedom, control and the tendency of individuals to conform to group behaviour rather than observing their higher ethical codes. Ostlund's press notes refer to the notorious Milgram experiment on obedience to authority, to the 1970s 'Good Samaritan' experiment conducted at Princeton (in which theology students notably failed to live up their own ideals) and to the so-called 'bystander effect', by which someone faced with a threatening scenario will tend to disappear into a crowd rather than act as an individual to help others. With *The Square*'s apeman scene – originally inspired by the crowd-baiting tactics of notorious punk provocateur G.G. Allin – Ostlund wanted to show the 'bystander effect' in action. "If we're feeling threatened, we become paralysed – we say, 'Don't take me, don't take me, take someone else.'"

Both *Force Majeure* and *The Square* hinge on the concept of shame as a factor in their characters' crises. "Human beings have a really strong capacity for shame. We actually commit suicide rather than live with shame." Even so, Ostlund insists that the point is not to judge characters like Christian. "When we discuss these things, we always put guilt on to the individual, we say, 'You didn't do anything.' But you don't create knowledge that way. We need to zoom out a bit – look at the structures of things and ask, 'What kind of behaviour does our culture create?'"

Nevertheless, there are two institutions that *The Square* does appear to target with an unequivocal amount of accusatory glee. One is the modern art world; the other, in league with it, and equally sealed into its own sometimes well-intentioned but often ethically vacant practices, is the world of PR. A truly jaw-dropping moment of black comedy is the unveiling of the online

CON ARTISTS
Elisabeth Moss plays a journalist who has a one-night stand with gallery director Christian (above) in *The Square*, directed by Ruben Ostlund (opposite)

publicity clip created for 'The Square' by a trendy PR agency: it's a work of strategic outrage designed to make viewers aware that it takes sensationalism to get their attention, yet its effect goes outrageously against the spirit of the utopian piece it's designed to promote.

However, says Ostlund, "the point was not to identify the PR agency as the cynical ones, rather [to show] that they're dealing with a cynical media landscape, in which the competition for the viewer has become goal number one. The content has become secondary." As Christian's PR gurus advise him, anyone hoping to be noticed online is in direct competition with catastrophes, acts of terror, far-right politicians. That's a lesson, Ostlund suggests, that cinema itself has had to learn in the age of YouTube and viral videos. "I really feel that to act like a PR agency is important if you're a director today – you have to manoeuvre in this cluster of images and say, 'My images are most important.' You have to find a way to get attention."

This, says Ostlund, is the downside of internet democracy, in which anyone can post any visual material whatsoever. And yet, he finds YouTube a deep well of inspiration: "Over the last 15, 20 years, the strongest experiences I've had of moving images have always been things people have sent to me or that I've found on the internet – that, in an interesting and precise way, point out things about us humans. These are the images we have to compete with to make cinema interesting enough to still exist."

In comparison with its commentary on online culture, *The Square*'s take on modern art comes across as somewhat broader. The gallery world is depicted in the film as a complacently self-aggrandising institution, a sealed biosphere that comments on the world's realities but also claims the right to distance itself loftily from their more troublesome aspects. The film is clearly steeped in research into the art world, and informed by a perverse love for it. Yet, sophisticated as *The Square* is, it often makes familiar, even facile points – as in the scene of Christian's blushing discomfiture at being asked to explain his own catalogue copy, a prize chunk of opaque international art-speak. As for a sight gag about an installation comprising rows of conical piles of dust, we're not far from the mid-70s British tabloid row about Carl Andre's bricks. It's disappointing that a film as sophisticated as *The Square* nevertheless seems at times to be recycling a tired emperor's new clothes polemic.

Even so, Ostlund argues his case, familiar as it may be. "Seriously, the modern art world has a huge problem," he says. "Theory has become a wet blanket all over the students." He points out that he teaches film in Gothenburg University, where the fine art department is right next to his: "The fine art students have to try and conquer this language [used by] their teachers and professors." The catalogue copy Christian struggles to explain is actually a text written by one of Ostlund's colleagues, which he cribbed without permission. "For me, that language is a power language that's excluding people." But the problem doesn't stop there, he says. "In my travels, I go to different contemporary museums and every one looks the same – the white cube, neon signs on the wall... They're maintaining a certain ritual and maintaining the value of these art pieces, which become an economic object to trade with, rather than something that tries to discuss what it is to live today."

In fact, he tells me, Ostlund had just screened the film at Stockholm's modern art museum, the Moderna Museet. So how did its diagnosis go down with art professionals? Very well, he says – perhaps disappointingly well. "They laugh about it and agree. I haven't managed to attack the art world in a way that makes them feel really provoked, so that's a bad thing."

***The Square* is released in UK cinemas on 16 March and is reviewed on page 75**

STEALING BEAUTY

HEDY LAMARR

Typecast in roles that showcased her pungent sex appeal and exotic allure, and unable to escape the notoriety that came from an early risqué performance in 'Ecstasy', Hedy Lamarr's studio-endorsed public persona gave little hint of her other life as a fiercely intelligent amateur scientist and inventor

By Pamela Hutchinson

"Any girl can be glamorous," Hollywood star Hedy Lamarr once said. "All you have to do is stand still and look stupid." It's a piquant quotation, even if it conceals as much as it reveals. Glamour is the result of effort, achieved by the pose and by the labour of make-up artists, dress designers, hair stylists, lighting technicians and photographers. Lamarr's payoff is the juicy bit though, the acknowledgement that a projection of intelligence would destroy the enchantment of dewy skin and pouting scarlet lips. A beautiful woman is to be looked at, not listened to: a siren rather than a signal. Lamarr's witticism is itself a pithy update of Jane Austen's caustic observation in *Northanger Abbey*: "A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can."

Lamarr's own career, detailed in new documentary *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* and a forthcoming miniseries, illustrates her point elegantly. In Hollywood, the Austrian-born actress was celebrated for looking gorgeous and lauded as "the most beautiful girl in the world", while away from the cameras, she was an amateur scientist, who patented a landmark invention in the field of mobile communications. "Her interest seemed to be divided between the part she was playing and another career as an inventor or discoverer of some fascinating new soft drink or useful invention," said

MOTHER OF INVENTION
Hedy Lamarr (opposite) worked with composer George Antheil to develop an idea for a system that could guide underwater missiles without being detected by the enemy, an invention that found numerous commercial and military uses, and helped lead to the development of wi-fi and Bluetooth

King Vidor, who directed her in *Comrade X* (1940) and *H.M. Pulham, Esq* (1941) "Although Hedy was a tremendous sex symbol to millions of moviegoers, she presented quite a different image to those working with her on the set." While Lamarr's star image was unusually complex, absorbing scandals, lawsuits, arthouse nudity, a fascist first husband, six divorces and her identity as an Austrian working in Hollywood during the war, her scientific endeavours were almost entirely suppressed in press coverage during her lifetime. Now, the titbit that a dazzling star of Hollywood's golden age devised an idea that led to the development of wi-fi and Bluetooth is probably better known than her film roles.

Born in Vienna in 1914 to a wealthy family, Hedwig Kiesler was educated by private tutors and at finishing school before she enrolled in Max Reinhardt's academy in Berlin in her teens. Hedwig is popularly shortened to Hedy, and as she scolded in her controversial memoir "to be correct, rhyme it with *lady*". She worked as an actor on stage and in films for just a few years before she landed her first lead role in a movie.

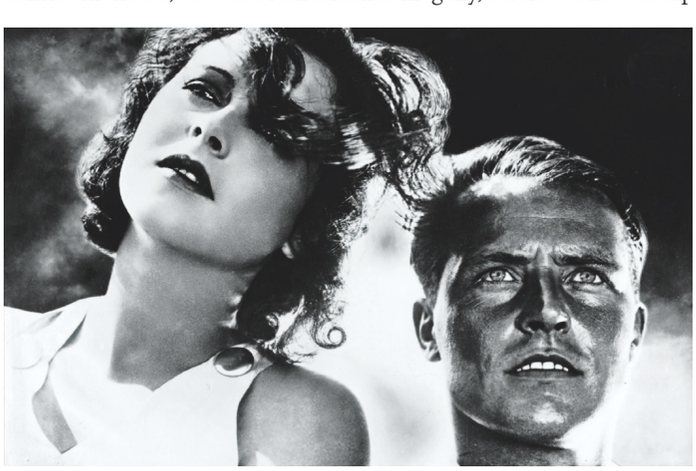
Gustav Machaty's *Ecstasy* (1933) brought Hedy not just fame but enduring notoriety. In this heavily symbolic, lyrical film, which is gorgeously photographed and unfolds with barely any dialogue, Hedy plays Eva, the young wife of an older, impotent husband. In one famous sequence Eva goes skinny-dipping and runs naked through the woods when her horse bolts, which is when she meets a young, handsome engineer called Adam (Aribert Mog). Even more outrageous was the scene in which Eva and Adam make love, and Hedy's face registers her orgasm in intimate close-ups. The scene was achieved, she later said, with more pain than pleasure: "I was told to lie down with my hands above my head while Aribert Mog whispered in my ear, and then kissed me in the most uninhibited fashion... I just closed my eyes." This did not satisfy Machaty who, grumbling about Hedy's "stupidity", reached for a safety pin. "'You will lie here,' he said. 'I will be underneath, out of camera range. When I prick you a little on your backside, you will bring your elbows together and you will *react*!'" The scene is acclaimed as one of the most passionate and sensual in cinema, but as Hedy remembered: "Some of those pinpricks shot pain through my body until it was vibrating in every nerve. I remember one shot when the close-up camera caught my face in a distortion of real agony, and the director yelled happily, 'Yes, good!'" The film was banned in the US, but was often screened illegally, before a censored version was released in the 1940s. Despite her Hollywood employers' best efforts, she would be referred to as the 'Ecstasy Girl' for the rest of her career.

Hedy at that time was married to Fritz Mandl, a wealthy businessman and fascist who owned an armaments firm. After four unhappy years, she left both him (via, as she tells it, an elaborate subterfuge) and Austria. After some protracted negotiations with Louis B. Mayer, she signed a contract with MGM and crossed the Atlantic to start a new career in 1937. Mayer had been scouting for European talent when he met Hedy, and was no doubt attracted by her great beauty and her sensitive portrayal of the tragic Eva in *Ecstasy*. However, as he made clear to her, nudity and onscreen orgasms were not the MGM way, and the studio struggled to market its new property correctly, let alone find her a suitable role. As the film historian John Kobal put it: "Confronted by a priceless object, everybody wanted her, but having got her they were at a loss to know what to do next."

The solution was not to capitalise on Hedy's racy past but on that of the studio. As Diane Negra has outlined, Hedy was renamed Lamarr in tribute to the 1920s Metro star Barbara La Marr (see Books, page 91), and her exotic allure was repackaged as a throwback to the silent era and the reign of the vamp. "Hedy takes up where the sinuous heroines of yesterday's movies left off," wrote Dorothy Ducas in the *Sunday Mirror*. For fan magazine writer Gladys Hall, "Old dreams and old delights are stirring in the hearts of women as well as in the hearts of men. She has brought back a distilled quintessence, the lure that was the other ravishing Lamarr's; she has brought back the mystery and consciousness of sex that belonged to such women as Negri, Swanson, Naldi, the 'burning Sapphoes,' and the Salomes and Cleopatras and Helenas who have never died." As long as *Ecstasy* was suppressed and Hedy kept telling the magazines how she longed for a husband, children and American citizenship, she could play the vamp, or something like it, on the big screen.

Fittingly, Lamarr's roles often involved pungent sex appeal, an exotic persona and few lines – she was elegant, sophisticated and far more taciturn than the talkative, assertive female stars of screwball comedy. Her first Hollywood role, on loan to United Artists, was playing opposite fellow European import Charles Boyer in *Algiers* (1938), a remake of *Pépé le Moko* (1937). In films such as Jacques Tourneur's gothic *noir Experiment Perilous* (1944), in which she played a turn-of-the-century femme fatale, she was explicitly displayed as a "priceless object" with a

As long as Hedy kept telling the magazines how she longed for a husband, children and American citizenship, she could play the vamp, or something like it, on the big screen



AGONY AND 'ECSTASY' Hedy Lamarr with Aribert Mog in ***Ecstasy*** **(1933, below left), the sexualised role that defined her for the rest of her career; and in Jacques Tourneur's *Experiment Perilous* (1944, below)**

mysterious past. As often as she was called on to embody an exotic, carnal beauty in films such as *Lady of the Tropics* (1939), *White Cargo* (1942) or Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949), the process of Americanising Lamarr, and subduing her sexiness, could also be played out in other movies. In *Come Live with Me* (1941) she's an Austrian refugee who falls for her American husband-of-convenience (James Stewart), renouncing her married lover. In *Ziegfeld Girl* (1941) she stars alongside Judy Garland and Lana Turner as a European immigrant who ends an affair with a Broadway star in favour of marital devotion. In that same film Garland sings a Hollywood fable with a sting: "In Hollywood Minnie travelled far. They changed her name to Minnie La Mar and pretty soon she became a star." As late as 1950 she's an Austrian refugee punished for entering the US illegally in *Lady Without a Passport*, and in 1951 she's a sultry foreign agent who switches sides as she falls for Bob Hope in slapstick comedy *My Favorite Spy*. She was offered the Ingrid Bergman role in *Casablanca*, Hollywood's best-loved interventionist fable, but MGM refused to loan her out for it, or for *Laura* (1944) or *Mr. Skeffington* (1944). She turned down *Gaslight* (1944) all by herself, though, and her regret may have coloured her enthusiasm to take on the very similar *Experiment Perilous*.

The sight of a decadent European apparently absorbing American values was particularly palatable during the war, and off screen as well, Lamarr played the good patriot. She entertained the troops and dished up in the Hollywood canteen, while the press muttered approvingly about her flight from Mandl, the Austrian "munitions millionaire". Lamarr had greater ambitions, though. As both *Bombshell* and Richard Rhodes's 2011 book *Hedy's Folly* detail, Lamarr had an idea for a system that could guide underwater missiles without being jammed by the enemy. It was called frequency hopping, and she developed it together with composer George Antheil, inspired in part by piano keys. Some have speculated that Lamarr pilfered the concept from Mandl's office, but it's true that she had a record of inventing other devices, including such oddities as soft drinks in cube form, and Antheil's memoirs go through the development process in some detail.

Sniffing a good story, Colonel Lent of the National Inventors Council (NIC) leaked the story to the press before the patent was granted, which caused a ripple of interest, and not a few 'Hedy's secret weapon' chortles. The *Los Angeles Times* report ran: "Hedy Lamarr – screen siren and inventor. The film favorite yesterday for the first time was portrayed in this dual role. Her invention, held secret by the government, is considered of great potential value in the national defense program." However, while Lamarr was regularly in the press, bouncing in and out of the divorce courts or promoting films, the invention story was not followed up, even when the patent was granted the following year. Evidently, the dual role was not compatible with Lamarr's image. The NIC told Lamarr the invention was unworkable, and if she wanted to help the war effort she would do better to show herself off on stage – which she did, selling millions of dollars of war bonds. Lamarr and Antheil's patent has been cited in other applications 62 times, from 1945 to 2012. Far from being unworkable, and unbeknown to Lamarr and Antheil, the idea found many commercial and military uses.

HOPE AND GLORY
The Austrian-born Hedy Lamarr plays a sultry foreign agent who switches sides in *My Favorite Spy* (1951), opposite Bob Hope

In the 1960s, Lamarr's career in film was over and her image was tarnished: she was no longer in the movies, she was living alone (she divorced her last husband in 1965), she had lost her looks (despite repeated plastic surgery), and she was yet more frequently in court. She was arrested a couple of times for absent-mindedly shoplifting, but she was also very litigious. When her lurid memoir, *Ecstasy and Me: My Life as a Woman*, was released in 1966, she claimed that the ghostwriter, hacky press agent turned pulp novelist Leo Guild, had fabricated much of the work, and she sued the publisher on the grounds that the stories contained therein about her love life were "fictional, false, vulgar, scandalous, libelous and obscene". The opening sentence runs: "I am a woman, above everything. Let me start by saying that in my life, as in the lives of most women, sex has been an important factor." Thereafter it descends into an onslaught of X-rated anecdotes. The suit was settled out of court, but the book was not edited.

Increasingly, the retired star was becoming the target of male filmmakers' humour. Andy Warhol's *Hedy* (1966) painted her as an egomaniacal has-been fanatically trying to recover her youthful beauty. In 1974 she, perhaps misguidedly, filed a $10 million suit against Warner Bros on the grounds that the joke about her name in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* ("It's not Hedy, it's Hedley Lamarr!") infringed her privacy. As Brooks told it, bimbo Lamarr "never got the joke". She also settled that one out of court, and increasingly shunned public appearances.

It wasn't until the end of Lamarr's life, in 1997, that the story of her groundbreaking invention was popularly discussed, and recognised by awards and exhibitions in the US and Austria, as well as stage plays, comic books and even a Google Doodle in 2015. Lamarr lived to see her intelligence acknowledged, but only just – she died in 2000, aged 85. After spending her Hollywood career "looking stupid" and trying to live down her risqué performance in *Ecstasy*, Lamarr might be pleased to know that her brilliant invention now overshadows most of her work on screen. Her gleaming image is now an icon of female intelligence, adopted to encourage young women into science.

***Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* is released in UK cinemas on 9 March. A short Hedy Lamarr season runs throughout March at BFI Southbank, London**

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

Hedy Lamarr was not the only smart, ambitious woman in Hollywood in the 40s – and for many women behind the camera, the war years brought exciting opportunities

By Christina Newland

When Hedy Lamarr arrived in Hollywood under the auspices of MGM head Louis B. Mayer, it was her avalanche of sex appeal that most interested the general public. Her beauty was said to siphon the air from a room, and the slick Hollywood production machine of 1938 wasted no time in getting her on to the big screen.

By the time the US entered the war in 1941, Lamarr's stardom was bankable, and she acted in a further ten motion pictures before the conflict came to a close. But not one of her filmic contributions to the war effort could measure up to her 1942 invention of a frequency-hopping communication signal that could make Allied torpedo attacks more deadly. As Alexandra Dean's new documentary *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* reveals, Hedy was an engineering genius in the body of a sex symbol – and one of the most deceptively ambitious, pioneering women of 1940s Hollywood.

As it turns out, Hedy was not alone. During the war years, a loss of manpower saw the number of women in the American workforce increase by more than 50 per cent, largely in male-dominated fields. This was as true in Hollywood as it was elsewhere. In cinema exhibition and distribution, tens of thousands of male employees were lost to military service, leaving space for usherettes to move into roles as projectionists and management. By March 1943, Warner Brothers reported having the first cinema in the United States staffed and run entirely by women. In terms of studio production, around 22 per cent of the male workforce had joined the armed forces by the end of 1942 and their numbers would increase greatly before the close of the war. Popular female stars ruled the box office, and women came out in droves to the cinema, outnumbering male moviegoers. Suddenly, female directors, writers and producers had much greater opportunities to showcase their talents.

Warner Brothers screenwriter Catherine Turney openly admitted that she was unlikely to have had any chance of working for the studio had it not been for the war. Jack Warner was otherwise uncomfortable with women writers, and it was only with the absence of so many men that he was forced to look elsewhere for talent. In a system in which writers were often at the bottom of the pecking order, Turney cleverly leveraged power by befriending the likes of Barbara Stanwyck and Bette Davis, collaborating with them on a number of successful star vehicles. Her most famous screenplay was *Mildred Pierce* (1945), depicting one of cinema's most memorable mother-daughter relationships – not to mention one of *film noir*'s most positive takes on female independence; but although Turney was later recognised as the chief architect of the script, the only onscreen credit, and an Oscar nomination, went to Ranald MacDougall.

The Brothers sister: Catherine Turney, screenwriter at Warner, where women remained 'a necessary evil'

In 1984, Turney told a reporter: "At Warner Brothers, women were not particularly highly thought of. We were seen as a necessary evil and were seldom paid as much as the men. I think the only reason that they put up with women writers was that they had big women stars. At one time they had Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford [...] All of them [...] demanded stories slanted toward women."

Tens of thousands of men were lost to military service, leaving space for usherettes to become projectionists and managers

Dorothy Kingsley also got her break during the war years, at a time when MGM had lost just over 1,000 of its male employees to military service. She was hired by the musical producer Arthur Freed and not long after was assigned to write screenplays for one of MGM's biggest female stars, 'bathing beauty' Esther Williams. Later Kingsley would quip, "Finally, I ran out of ways to get her in the water." But her string of glossy commercial hits for Williams made her a reliable source for screenplays and little fixes around the studio. Having got this chance to prove her worth by an accident of circumstance, she went on to produce her most famous work in the 1950s, including the musicals *Kiss Me Kate* (1953), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954) and *Pal Joey* (1957), for which she talked Frank Sinatra into taking a starring role.

Another MGM contract writer, Isobel Lennart, was one of Kingsley's best pals at the studio, and this kind of female solidarity was crucial when the writer's room was packed with men who were often less than gallant. "Isobel was a love [...] we were very close. She used to run into my office to talk all the time," Kingsley told interviewer Pat McGilligan. Lennart, too, distinguished

herself by writing frothy comedies and musicals in the escapist wartime mould, including the musicals *Anchors Aweigh* (1945, with Sinatra, Kathryn Grayson and Gene Kelly) and *It Happened in Brooklyn* (1947, with Sinatra, Grayson and Peter Lawford).

While Lennart, a former Communist Party member, reluctantly testified at the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee, fellow traveller and outspoken screenwriter Lillian Hellman refused – "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions" – and was summarily blacklisted. Prior to that career-ruining incident, Hellman had been a larger-than-life hellraiser and voiced early criticism of growing Nazi power overseas. Her screenplay for *Watch on the Rhine* (1943) was an indictment of America's failure to act against fascism sooner, and she proved more explicitly political than almost any other female screenwriter around. Unfortunately, in the virulent McCarthyism of the post-war years, that would be her downfall.

There were even fewer women executives and producers in this male-dominated environment, but one who managed it was the Sorbonne-educated Englishwoman Joan Harrison. She worked her way up from a role that no one took seriously, as a secretary and assistant to Alfred Hitchcock, and went on to co-write a series of screenplays for Hitch, including *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941) and *Saboteur* (1942).

Harrison grew tired of not having more control over her writing and decided to produce her own picture, *Phantom Lady*, in 1944. She specialised in female-led *noir* and dark melodrama, and as a 1946 *Screenland* interview noted, "Joan works on a picture from its inception to its finish and never misses checking the day's rushes. Nothing gets into one of Miss. Harrison's pictures that Miss. Harrison does not want in."

In Lizzie Francke's indispensable history of female screenwriters, *Script Girls* (1994), Harrison says, "They – those ultimate 'they' who have the say-so on such decisions – simply do not want to give a woman authority. They recognise our capabilities, but it goes against the grain of the male ego to place a woman in a position of authority."

Virginia Van Upp was another woman who moved beyond screenwriting during the war years, signing on as an associate producer of the Rita Hayworth vehicle *Cover Girl* (1944). She became one of the highest-paid executives at Columbia Studios and one of the only women at that managerial level in the whole of Hollywood – with a production unit (largely of men) under her command. Her close friendship with Hayworth yielded a productive working relationship, including the actor's most famous film: *Gilda* (1946).

Hitch a ride: screenwriter and producer Joan Harrison specialised in female-led *noir* and dark melodrama

As time went on, Van Upp moved on to more meaty psychological drama. Fascinated by the effect of the war on countless wives and widows, she shepherded into production *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947), directed by Henry Levin and starring Rosalind Russell as a mourning widow whose husband saved the lives of five men by jumping on a grenade. Bitter and angry, the title character sets out to find the men and learn if her husband's sacrifice was "worth it". Although a script disagreement with original director Charles Vidor – with whom she had collaborated on *Gilda* – led to Van Upp being replaced as producer by Helen Deutsch, her input was critical in bringing to the screen a woman's picture with an unusually hard-edged emotional arc and a streak of *noir*-tinged regret and grief. Based on a story by veteran screenwriter Lenore J. Coffee, the project was front-loaded with female talent, even if the film ultimately failed to do well financially.

Like many women in her position, Van Upp had difficulties with the male hierarchy. Tyrannical studio head Harry Cohn promoted and supported her but, according to biographer Bob Thomas, also sexually harassed her at every turn. Routine discrimination, unfair pay-scales and a general lack of respect and opportunities for career advancement made it tough for women to stay in the business long. By the early 1950s, Van Upp had quit Columbia; her last screen credit was in 1952.

***Gilda* producer Virginia Van Upp**

In Hollywood's efforts to galvanise a nation, the input and creativity of its women became central in a way that had not been seen since the silent days. A female screenwriter like Leigh Brackett could take on a masculine genre like *noir* (*The Big Sleep*, 1946) – and having got a toe in the door, she could move on to the even more masculine world of the western (*Rio Bravo*, 1959). Meanwhile, women like Van Upp and Harrison oversaw increasingly ambitious projects.

The impulse to project proto-feminism on to their writing and film output is strong, but often misses the point. Even the women who worked exclusively in 'feminine' genres – sparkly romantic comedy, tearjerkers and wholesome musicals – put a dent in assumptions about what women could do. Over the war years, those assumptions shifted drastically. Yet by the late 1940s, women were being ushered back into the home with considerable force. The public good was deemed to be best served by female domesticity and maternal influence, regardless of women's wartime efforts. Many found it hard to put the aprons back on, though; writers like Dorothy Kingsley, Isobel Lennart and Leigh Brackett went on to even greater success. If Hollywood learned anything about gender relations during World War II, it was that you just can't keep a good woman down.

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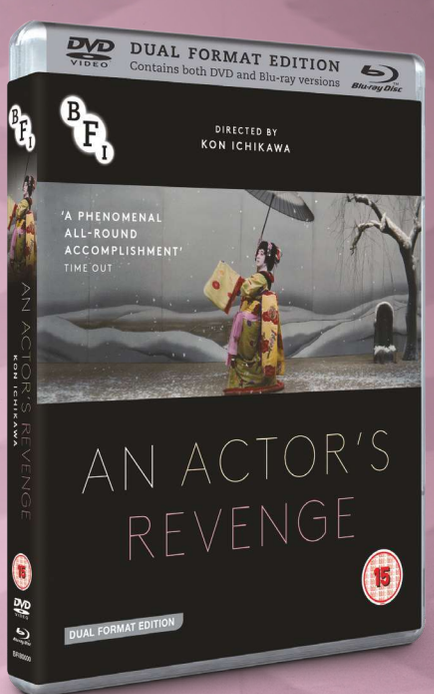

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Reviews

73 Red Sparrow

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50 Films of the Month

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The secret agent: Lupita Nyong'o as Wakandan spy Nakia in Ryan Coogler's electrifying addition to the superhero genre

Black Panther

Director: Ryan Coogler
Certificate 12A 134m 22s

Reviewed by Kelli Weston

The latest big-screen superhero spectacle, *Black Panther*, from director Ryan Coogler and co-screenwriter Joe Robert Cole, begins with a history lesson. A colourful animated sequence unravels the origins of the fictional African nation of Wakanda, as told by a father to his son. Wakanda, the home of our hero T'Challa (played with muted gravitas by Chadwick Boseman), has disguised itself to the outside world as a poor farming nation, in keeping with the stereotypes that often reduce the continent to a single country. In fact, the entirely self-sufficient Wakanda has never been conquered by outside forces and is the most technologically advanced nation in the world thanks to vibranium, a rare sound-absorbent metal, desperately coveted by those aware of its more violent effects. At once lush and bucolic, urban and futuristic, with gargantuan rhinos and flying spacecraft and, perhaps most importantly, populated by a people of rich tradition, Wakanda soon becomes emblematic of the film's loftier themes: it's a tale of home, and so a tale of history, and so a tale that begs for cultural specificity even in its fantastical framework. Thus *Black Panther* diverges from the tradition of the superhero films that have come before it, films that by their very nature strive to appease, not to offend.

To be sure, *Black Panther* is very much a product of its genre. It's a dynamic, electrifying ride of a film, with balanced measures of comedy, action and heart. But so much of that heart, so much of what will likely resonate with audiences, cannot be extricated from the immovable politics and inherent implications of a black superhero (though he has been preceded by the *Blade* trilogy and 2004's *Catwoman*, among others). The birth of Black Panther in 1966 (created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby) predated the official formation of the American Black Panther Party, but coincided with an era of independence for many African countries. It is nearly impossible to divorce Wakanda from its very real neighbours, ripped apart by colonisation and plundered of their natural resources. And to their credit, Coogler and Cole embrace these politics wholeheartedly.

Black Panther follows the events of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) after the sudden death of King T'Chaka (John Kani). Still mourning his father, T'Challa returns home to his mother Ramonda (a regal Angela Bassett) and his witty, engineer-savant sister Shuri (Letitia Wright), whose innovative weapon and gadget designs protect her brother and her country. With their

Chadwick Boseman as T'Challa

support, he ascends to the throne as Wakanda's king and warrior-protector Black Panther, and immediately finds himself at the centre of an age-old battle between tradition and modernity, and more pressingly, between justice and revenge. When black-market arms dealer Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis) crosses his radar, T'Challa enlists the help of old flame Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o), a Wakandan spy, and Okoye (Danai Gurira), the head of the Dora Milaje, Wakanda's elite all-female royal guard. Klaue absconded with a portion of vibranium years ago and murdered the parents of T'Challa's best friend W'Kabi (Daniel Kaluuya), but their plans to bring him to justice are thwarted by American black-ops soldier Erik 'Killmonger' Stevens (Michael B. Jordan), who harbours a secret connection to Wakanda. Erik, like T'Challa, has lost a beloved father, but unlike T'Challa, he grew up poor on the streets of Oakland (a nod to the film's Oakland-born director). A ruthless fighter, Erik sets his sights on the throne, determined to avenge his father and save, in his mind, the oppressed peoples the Wakandans could easily aid but choose to ignore.

Earlier in the film, as part of the coronation ritual, T'Challa visits his dead father in the 'ancestral plane' and the dead king tells his son,

Most superhero films struggle to give their female characters enough, if anything, to do – but the real stars of 'Black Panther' are its women

"It is hard for a good man to be a king." This pronouncement does not – at least in the current instalment – foreshadow T'Challa's internal character arc. He is noble, almost to a fault, and in fact one of the film's few flaws is that he almost never betrays any semblance of moral complexity. These words instead become an indictment of the seemingly gracious former king.

Each of Coogler's three films has been concerned with the legacy of fathers. His assured debut *Fruitvale Station* (2013) charts the final day in the life of Oscar Grant III – killed by a California transit police officer in 2009 – and much of the film's emotional weight resides in the wide, unknowing eyes of the daughter Grant will leave behind. *Creed* (2015) – his reboot of the Rocky franchise, which follows the boxing career of the son of Rocky's late rival and friend Apollo Creed – and now *Black Panther* both follow protagonists burdened by history and haunted by a looming inheritance. They are both men who set out to forge their paths in the name of fallen fathers, soon revealed to be not quite heroes but deeply complex figures whose sins endure beyond the grave to trouble their sons. How these sons ultimately reckon with the humanity of the men they have made into legends and how powerfully they allow the past to guide their steps will prove the measure of their character.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is no stranger to the tragedy of patrilineal trauma, with Thor, Tony Stark and lately Peter Quill all grappling with varying degrees of filial strife. But what in part distinguishes *Black Panther*, the film and the man, from other Avengers is this reverence for ancestors, and the ripples – the curses and blessings – that the past sends across generations into the present. It lends the movie a refreshing poignancy and vitality rarely found in the age of superhero films.

Comparisons to *The Lion King* (1994) are well earned, but the film also feels a natural heir to classic Afrofuturist cinema such as *Space Is the Place* (1974) and *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984). Moreover, Coogler brings a deft, nuanced grace to questions of generational hauntings and Wakanda's responsibility to the outside world. For, ultimately, Erik embodies all the rage and pain of the African diaspora, of a people displaced and cheated out of an inheritance.

Jordan, in this his third collaboration with Coogler, commands the screen with a simmering gaze and a bitter, acerbic delivery, in a magnetic performance sure to earn Killmonger the rabid fanaticism of Loki and Heath Ledger's Joker before him. Boseman, for his part, despite having the more thankless role of the two, carries the film with a quiet dignity one might rightfully expect of a man raised to be king.

That said, the real stars of *Black Panther* are its women, both in front of and behind the camera. Most superhero films – and Marvel has generally been no exception – struggle to give their female characters enough, if anything, to do. The Dora Milaje elite guard can boast one of the most impressive combat sequences in recent memory; Gurira as their staunch traditionalist general is a revelation throughout, and her fight scenes easily outshine any between T'Challa and Erik. Nyong'o makes for a compelling love interest, one who has her own ambitions, and Bassett is an elegant, endearing Queen Mother. But it is Wright, the charming, lively Q to her brother's Bond, who emerges as the bright star of the film.

Rachel Morrison, who recently became the first woman nominated for an Academy Award in the cinematography category for her work on last year's *Mudbound*, produces some remarkably stunning visuals here, while Ruth E. Carter's costumes cement the film's Afrofuturist aesthetic with elaborate designs inspired by real-life African tribes such as the Xhosa, Dogon and Suri, among others.

A meticulously crafted film, *Black Panther* establishes itself as a kinetic, powerful entry in the superhero genre.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Feige
Written by
Ryan Coogler
Joe Robert Cole
Director of Photography
Rachel Morrison
Edited by
Michael P. Shawver
Debbie Berman
Production Designer
Hannah Beachler

Music
Ludwig Göransson
Costume Designer
Ruth E. Carter
Visual Effects and Animation
Industrial Light & Magic

Production Company
Marvel Studios
presents

Executive Producers
Jeffrey Chernov
Stan Lee
Victoria Alonso
Nate Moore
Louis D'Esposito

Cast
Chadwick Boseman
Prince T'Challa, 'Black Panther'
Michael B. Jordan
Erik Stevens, N'Jadaka, 'Killmonger'
Lupita Nyong'o
Nakia
Danai Gurira
Okoye
Martin Freeman
Everett K. Ross
Daniel Kaluuya
W'Kabi
Letitia Wright
Princess Shuri
Winston Duke
M'Baku
Angela Bassett
Ramonda, Queen Mother
Forest Whitaker
Zuri
Andy Serkis
Ulysses Klaue
Denzel Whitaker
young Zuri
Florence Kasumba
Ayo
John Kani
King T'Chaka
Sterling K. Brown
N'Jobu

Dolby Atmos/ Auro 11.1
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

During a brief animated sequence, a father relates to his son the history of the African nation of Wakanda.

California, 1992. King T'Chaka of Wakanda accuses his younger brother, Prince N'Jobu, of aiding arms dealer Ulysses Klaue in stealing vibranium from Wakanda –and then kills him.

Wakanda, present day. Prince T'Challa prepares to ascend the throne but is challenged by M'Baku, leader of the mountain tribe. T'Challa defeats M'Baku but spares his life and succeeds to the throne. When T'Challa intercepts Klaue, he forges a brief alliance with CIA agent Everett Ross. Erik 'Killmonger' Stevens rescues Klaue but kills him soon afterwards; he brings the body to Wakanda, and presents it to T'Challa's childhood friend W'Kabi, whose parents were murdered by Klaue.

Erik identifies himself as N'Jadaka, son of N'Jobu; as T'Challa's cousin, he has a claim to the throne. In the ensuing combat, he defeats T'Challa and becomes the new king. Believing T'Challa dead, his mother Ramonda and sister Shuri escape, but are taken by the mountain tribe; M'Baku reveals that he has been keeping T'Challa alive, in a coma.

A heart-shaped herb heals T'Challa and he returns to find Erik sending vibranium-powered weapons across the world to begin a revolution. With Shuri's help, Ross prevents the planes delivering the weapons. The Dora Milaje, Wakanda's all-female special forces, quell the insurrection, and T'Challa kills Erik in combat.

T'Challa returns with Shuri to their cousin's childhood neighbourhood in Oakland, and plans to share Wakanda's resources with the world.

The Third Murder

Japan 2017
Director: Koreeda Hirokazu

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

A defence lawyer enlisted to discover the motives of a confessed murderer in the hope of preventing his likely death penalty, the hero of Koreeda Hirokazu's new film shares the same ambition as the investigators in countless policiers and procedurals in print and on screen: to know the mind of a killer. But when the lawyer visits his father – a judge who handled an earlier case involving the same enigmatic client – the older man tells his son how difficult it may be to understand fully why the seemingly mild-mannered Misumi clubbed his boss over the head one night before dousing his body with gasoline and setting it alight. "People hardly understand members of their own family," the judge says sagely, "let alone strangers."

Viewers familiar with Koreeda's movies may detect a note of irony in that truism. After all, Koreeda owes his status as one of the most celebrated contemporary Japanese directors to his penchant for films in which family members try, and largely fail, to figure out what each of them wants and needs. While his new film may only rarely resemble the 'home dramas' for which he's renowned, its focus on the unbearable inscrutability of other human beings certainly connects it to the rather more Ozu-like *Still Walking* (2008) and *Our Little Sister* (2015). What's more, his new film's most recent predecessor, *After the Storm* (2016), also had an investigator as its protagonist, though in that case he was a rumpled small-time private detective and slumming novelist rather than the polished and dashing legal eagle played here by Fukuyama Masaharu, the long-time Japanese music heartthrob who starred in Koreeda's *Like Father, Like Son* (2013). All this makes *The Third Murder* less of a departure for the director than it may initially seem due to its bloody opening scene, uncharacteristic slickness and courtroom-thriller trappings. (Koreeda's 2009 sentient-sex-toy comedy *Air Doll* remains the outlier in his back catalogue, though the wry fantasy elements of his 1998 arthouse staple *After Life* and his detour into the samurai genre with 2006's *Hana* suggest a propensity for unpredictability; it may be wise to expect more deviations from the mean.)

Like *After the Storm*, *The Third Murder* portrays its lead character Shigemori as he shifts between his professional and personal spheres, though only for the first hour. Always a master at capturing small, telling details and casual intimacies, Koreeda conveys the easy collegiality between Shigemori and his colleagues in their many conversations and strategy sessions just as acutely as he does the lawyer's sadness and guilt over his strained relationship with his daughter, who resents how little attention she's had from her father (sadly, the film gives her only a little more).

Shigemori's workaholism and emotional remoteness flag him as the latest in a long series of faulty patriarchs in Koreeda's work, like the deadbeat gambler in *After the Storm* or the long-gone fathers of the kids in *Nobody Knows* (2004). The murderer Misumi is a more sinister example of the bad dad, yet one who's oddly admirable due to his determination to be a protector for Sakie, the teenager whose sexually abusive father he has murdered. (Whether that's actually his motive remains one of the mystery's many stubborn ambiguities.) Then there are the small suggestions of Shigemori's own father issues in his somewhat deferential interactions with his older colleague Settsu and his one scene dining with the judge. (As in the Ozu films that Koreeda's work so often evokes, characters seem to be forever preparing and eating meals together.)

Before the law: Fukuyama Masaharu as Shigemori (centre) and Yakusho Koji as Misumi (far right)

Unfortunately, the clunkier conventions of the legal thriller eventually take precedence over the finer elements that are more characteristic of Koreeda's brand of family drama. While *The Third Murder* may at times feel like a hired-gun assignment, it's actually the product of a typically meticulous development process for the director. He was originally inspired to write the film after a conversation with a lawyer friend, who pointed out that Japan's justice system has far

Memories of murder: Saito Yuki as the victim's wife Mitsue and Hirose Suzu as his daughter Sakie

less to do with the pursuit of truth than with the adjusting of details to make them fit the ready-made narratives that lawyers and judges need to get their jobs done. Though Misumi's case eventually undermines his confidence, Shigemori echoes that point when he tells an associate, "Legal strategy is the truth."

The director spent months working on the script with a team of lawyers, using mock trials and interviews to ensure that his portrayal of the process was accurate. Perhaps inevitably, then, the end result feels mired in minutiae, with many courtroom and interview scenes offering only minor variations on each other as the characters' conversations circle around the same themes without adding much in the way of nuance or clarity. While that may in fact be a more accurate representation of the gear-grinding of many countries' judicial systems than the sensationalistic contrivances and conveniences of most legal thrillers, *The Third Murder* still relies on several last-minute revelations whose presence may be unusual for a Koreeda drama but are standard fare for John Grisham's plot mechanics.

It's also disappointing that the film gradually narrows its focus after establishing such a strong ensemble in the early going. Played by Yoshida Kotaro, Shigemori's garrulous peer Settsu is one of many characters who recede from the foreground too soon. Ichikawa Mikako, a standout in Anno Hideaki and Higuchi Shinji's delightfully unhinged *kaiju* reboot *Shin Godzilla* (2016), is similarly underused as the prosecutor Shinohara. By the time *The Third Murder* reaches its final stages, those wider spheres of the first hour have been reduced to the repeated image of investigator and criminal facing off on opposite sides of a glass wall – a thriller trope that filmmakers have struggled to revitalise in the decades since Hannibal Lecter first purred the words "Hello, Clarice" in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Though Yakusho Koji is on typically excellent form as Misumi – few actors could make so much out of their character enjoying a spoonful of peanut butter – seeing him participate in these head games in such close quarters invites comparisons with the star's string of similarly cerebral but more compelling thrillers with director Kurosawa Kiyoshi, starting with the exquisitely bleak and ruthless *Cure* (1997).

To his credit, Koreeda – working in CinemaScope for the first time with cinematographer Takimoto Mikiya – continually finds ways to devise formally elegant compositions within the usually unpromising spaces of prison interview rooms and courthouse hallways and staircases. Similarly, the film demonstrates an admirable willingness by Koreeda to move beyond the comfort zone of the home dramas that have guaranteed him a place on festival competition slates for most of the past two decades. Yet despite the care and thoughtfulness of his efforts here, his murder mystery is ultimately tedious and ordinary enough to suggest that he's venturing into terrain better left to those with less high-minded objectives. S

The film shows an admirable willingness by Koreeda to move beyond the comfort zone of the home dramas that have guaranteed him festival exposure

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Matsuzaki Kaoru
Taguchi Hijiri
Screenplay
Koreeda Hirokazu
Original Story
Koreeda Hirokazu
Director of Photography
Takimoto Mikiya
Edited by
Koreeda Hirokazu
Production Designer
Taneda Yohei
Original Music Composed, Arranged and Produced by/ Piano/Guitar/ Electronics
Ludovico Einaudi
Production Sound & Re-recording Mixer
Tomita Kazuhiko
Stylist
Kurosawa Kazuko

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Production Companies
Production committee: Fuji Television Network, Amuse, Gaga
Production by FILM - Fuji IG Laboratory for Movies
Presented by Fuji Television Network, Inc., Amuse Inc., Gaga Corporation
Chief Executive Producers
Ogawa Shinichi
Harada Chiaki
Tom Yoda

Cast
Fukuyama Masaharu Shigemori Tomoaki
Hirose Suzu Yamanaka Sakie
Mitsushima Shinnosuke Kawashima Akira
Ichikawa Mikako Shinohara Itsuki
Matsuoka Izumi Hattori Akiko
Makita Aju Shigemori Yuka
Inoue Hajime Ono Minoru
Hashizume Isao Shigemori Akihisa
Saito Yuki Yamanaka Mitsue
Yoshida Kotaro Settsu Daisuke
Yakusho Koji Misumi Takashi
Shinagawa Toru
Negishi Toshie
Takahashi Tsutomu
Ogura Ichiro

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Arrow Films

Japanese theatrical title
Sandome no Satsujin

Tokyo, present day. Defence lawyer Shigemori is enlisted by his colleague Settsu to take over the case of Misumi, an ex-convict and factory worker who has been arrested for robbing and murdering his boss. Though Misumi has confessed to the killing, his recollection of the night of the crime and his explanation of his motive change with each telling. Seeking to reduce the charges to avoid the death penalty for his client, Shigemori digs into Misumi's history and discovers parallels with the earlier double murder for which he spent 30 years in prison. He also finds out that Misumi had developed a friendship with the victim's daughter, Sakie. Misumi now claims that he was hired to kill his boss by the latter's wife Mitsue, with whom he says he was having an affair. Her denial is undermined by a suspicious payment she made to Misumi before the murder, though a conversation with Sakie reveals that it was part of a scheme to cover up illegal practices at the factory.

After her mother testifies at Misumi's trial, Sakie tells Shigemori that her father was sexually abusing her and that she believes Misumi murdered him to protect her. Before she can testify, Misumi claims he did not commit the murder. Though his retraction throws the legal proceedings into disarray, the judge rejects the prosecution's request for a new trial and sentences Misumi to death. Shigemori sees Misumi in jail and tells him he knows that he retracted his confession in order to prevent Sakie from having to testify. Misumi implies that this was the case but does not admit to any clear reason for the murder.

Shock corridor: Claire Foy as Sawyer Valentini, an inmate at a psychiatric institution trying to elude a vicious stalker, in Steven Soderbergh's horror film

Unsane

USA 2018
Director: Steven Soderbergh

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Following on from *Logan Lucky* (2017), his return to the big screen after his four-year 'retirement', Steven Soderbergh brings us his first horror movie. It takes a well-used cinematic situation, dating back at least to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920): a person (more often than not a young woman) confined against their will in a psychiatric institution, whose protests that they're perfectly sane are condescendingly (or mockingly) dismissed by the staff, or taken as proof that they're 'in denial'. But Soderbergh works a number of original twists on it, not least in bringing the motivation cynically up to date. In previous excursions into this territory, the reason for the unjustified immurement was sometimes political, as in Mark Robson's *Bedlam* (1946 – the last of producer Val Lewton's string of low-budget horror movies for RKO), in which do-gooding actress Anna Lee is getting too close to the truth about Boris Karloff's hellhole of a loony bin. More often it was personal, as when a spouse, mistress or family member is becoming in some way an encumbrance: Olivia de Havilland in Anatole Litvak's *The Snake Pit* (1948), Jean-Pierre Mocky in Georges Franju's *La Tête contre les murs* (1959), or Isabelle Adjani in Bruno Nuytten's *Camille Claudel* (1988). Or they know something they shouldn't, like Elizabeth Taylor in Joseph Mankiewicz's *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959).

In the case of Sawyer Valentini (Claire Foy), a stalker victim who, after an interview with a seemingly sympathetic counsellor at the Highland Creek Behavioural Center, finds herself stripped of her clothes, deprived of her cell phone and confined in a locked ward, it turns out that the motive is purely profit-driven. The ostensible reason is that she told a counsellor that, worn down by the relentless attentions of her stalker David Strine (Joshua Leonard), she has entertained thoughts of suicide; on the strength of this she's classified as being in danger of 'self-harming', and having unwisely signed a sheaf of forms without bothering to read them properly, is told that she has voluntarily committed herself. But as fellow inmate Nate (Jay Pharoah) explains to her, Highland Creek, as part of a conglomerate called ADS Health Enterprises, has "a number to hit": the more people it can lock up each month, the more cash it can claim from the patients' insurance companies. Sawyer's incarceration simply makes the bottom line look healthier.

All this, of course, is camouflaged under a smokescreen of smug high-mindedness. Highland Creek's clinician Miss Brighterhouse assures Sawyer's mother Angela (Amy Irving), whom Sawyer has managed to contact via Nate's concealed cell phone, that ADS is "a very ethical organisation", its sole concern the wellbeing of its patients. This after we've seen Sawyer confined to a mixed-sex ward in a bed next to the toilet, where her nearest bed-neighbour is the deranged Violet (a startlingly repellent performance from Juno Temple), who calls her 'Alison' and threatens to cut her with a jagged piece of metal.

Soderbergh, though, avoids the trap of making Sawyer too much the pathetic victim. When we first meet her, working for a banking concern in a Pennsylvania city (having fled her native Boston to get away from David), she's on the phone giving a customer distinctly frosty treatment. ("I hope he prefers vinegar to honey," comments a colleague, when Sawyer gets off the phone. "She," is Sawyer's monosyllabic response.) Having met an online contact, Jesse, in a bar, she takes him back to her apartment and initiates a clinch – only to push him away abruptly with a scream and dash for the bathroom in a panic attack, leaving him to depart bemused. Her behaviour at Highland Creek, at first contemptuous and then verbally

Experimental as ever, Soderbergh not only shot 'Unsane' in secret – the release of the trailer was the first most people knew of it – but did so using iPhones

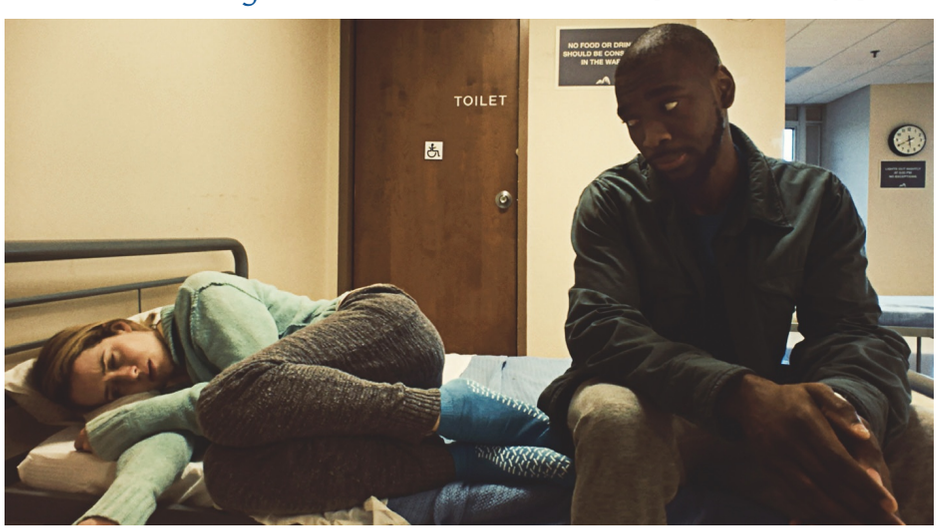
and physically violent, gives the staff more excuses to strap her down and drug her into submission. Ideal casting, then, for Foy, who ever since her breakthrough in the title role of the BBC's *Little Dorrit* (2008) has shown that she knows how to access an inner steeliness – never more so than as two queens: Anne Boleyn in *Wolf Hall* (2015) and Elizabeth II in *The Crown* (2016-).

This arm's-length treatment of Sawyer's character makes it easier for Soderbergh to keep us guessing, for the first half of the film, whether George Shaw, one of the nurses at Highland Creek, really is her Boston stalker, David, or whether this is a figment of her unhinged mind – all the more so since she herself starts to doubt it. Only once we've seen him invading Angela's hotel room under false pretences, with evidently malign intent, is it clear that 'George' really is David.

This, though, points up one of the major credibility plot holes in Jonathan Bernstein and James Greer's script. When Sawyer is first committed to Highland Creek, 'George' is already on the staff – and, we gather from a conversation he has with one of his colleagues, has been there for some time. Since Sawyer has only just chosen the facility, having found it online, how would David know that's where she'd end up? And later, after Angela is found murdered in the woods (we gather that David killed her, though we don't see it happen), we hear the police saying they've found George Shaw's fingerprints on her body. As he doesn't exist, there's no way 'George' would have a police record, so where would the cops have got his prints?

Still, this is essentially a horror movie, where the occasional plot hole is traditionally permissible. And it's redeemed by some effectively sardonic passages (neat use of a crucifix) and well-gauged performances. As David/George, Leonard offers an unsettling mix of the avuncular, the pitiable and the downright creepy; having succeeded in getting Sawyer confined to solitary, he woos her with maudlin talk of "a little cabin in the woods in New Hampshire", and a nearby diner they could run together, not long after we've seen him brutally killing Nate. Even so, he's not the creepiest character in the movie; that honour is taken (in a flashback to Sawyer's Boston days) by the security expert she calls in to advise her on how best to evade her stalker. Having explained the multiple precautions she should take – quit Facebook, always park under a streetlamp, vary her times of arriving at and leaving work and so on – he brightly presents her with some essential reading: a fat paperback entitled *The Gift of Fear*.

Insouciantly experimental as ever, Soderbergh not only shot *Unsane* in secret – the release of the trailer was the first most people knew of it – but did so using iPhones. He's been quoted as commenting, "Anybody going to see this movie who has no idea of the backstory to the production will have no idea this was shot on the phone. That's not part of the conceit... People forget this is a 4K capture. I've seen it 40ft tall. It looks like velvet. This is a game changer to me." There's an oppressive darkness to the overall palette that may derive from the technology, but perfectly fits the subject matter – especially in the hallucinatory subjective multiple-exposure sequence when David slips Sawyer a dangerous overdose. Taken in conjunction with Thomas Newman's unnervingly discordant score, *Unsane* ingeniously maps out fresh territory in a well-trodden field. S



Beyond bedlam: Foy as Valentini with Jay Pharoah as Nate

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Joseph Malloch
Written by
Jonathan Bernstein
James Greer
Director of Photography
Peter Andrews
[ie, Steven Soderbergh]
Edited by
Mary Ann Bernard
[ie, Steven Soderbergh]
Production Design
April Lasky
Original Music
David Wilder Savage
[ie, Thomas Newman]
Production Sound Mixer
Thomas Varga

Costume Design
Susan Lyall

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Production Companies
A New Regency/ Extension 765 production
Executive Producers
Ken Meyer
Arnon Milchan
Dan Fellman

Cast

Claire Foy
Sawyer Valentini
Joshua Leonard
David Strine
Jay Pharoah
Nate Hoffman
Juno Temple
Violet
Aimee Mullins
Ashley Brighterhouse
Amy Irving
Angela Valentini
Sarah Stiles
Jill

In Colour
[1.56:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Present-day Pennsylvania. Thirtysomething Sawyer Valentini works for a bank, having relocated from Boston to escape a persistent stalker, David Strine. Her attempts to form new relationships are frustrated by panic attacks. Seeking help online, she finds the Highland Creek Behavioural Center outside town. Having talked to a sympathetic adviser and signed some forms, she finds herself stripped of her clothes and confined to a mixed ward; she is told at first that she will be held for 24 hours, and then for a week. She is subjected to verbal abuse by Violet, the woman in the next bed. Sawyer is horrified to recognise one of the nurses, George Shaw, as her stalker David. With the help of fellow inmate Nate, she manages to contact her mother Angela in Boston.

Angela arrives and promises Sawyer that she will get her out; but the facility's director stonewalls her and the police are no help. Sawyer starts to wonder if she is delusional in thinking that Shaw is David. David tricks his way into Angela's room at the hotel. He also slips a dangerous overdose into Sawyer's medication. Realising that Nate is supporting Sawyer, David kills him with ECT and an overdose. Sawyer's increasingly angry and violent behaviour leads to her being confined to solitary. David confronts her there, telling her how much he loves her. Angela's murdered body is found in the woods. Sawyer talks David into bringing Violet down to solitary; she stabs him with the sharp piece of metal that Violet keeps on her, and escapes. David catches her and knocks her out; she wakes in the trunk of his car beside Violet's body. Pursued by him in the woods, she stabs him in the eye with Violet's crucifix. The police raid Highland Creek and arrest the staff.

Back at work six months later, Sawyer thinks she sees David in a diner; she realises that he will continue to haunt her.

Antonio Lopez 1970 Sex Fashion & Disco

USA 2017, Director: James Crump

Beach master: Antonio Lopez (left) and friends

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

To listen to the interviewees gathered for this documentary portrait and tribute to the influential, iconoclastic fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez, he was an amazing guy: amazing line, amazing eye for talent, amazing dancer, amazing lover. He presided over a floating party of disco and drugs and art and orgies, bringing together amazing creative young people to have an amazing creative young time. And I'm fully convinced that it was amazing – but not that there's much of a movie in it.

A viewer unfamiliar with Lopez's legacy, like this one, will certainly learn something: principally, that he defined a multi-ethnic, unorthodox, defiantly downtown feminine ideal with his 'Antonio Girls', a type as specific as the Gibson or Vargas model. Turning out reams upon reams of illustrations, travelling in heavily photographed circles, Lopez left his stamp on an enormous stockpile of imagery, a fact of which James Crump's film takes full advantage. The movie shares its title with a hefty monograph by Roger and Mauricio Padilha published in 2012 by Rizzoli, and I'm not sure that the coffee-table format, allowing one to bask at leisure in the imagery, isn't better suited to the subject, though here there is the inducement of hearing raconteur *par excellence* Bill Cunningham hold court in his Boston brogue one last time – the photographer and subject of the popular documentary *Bill Cunningham: New York* died very shortly after the film was completed.

Since the appearance of *Bill Cunningham: New York* in 2010, it seems that there has been a proliferation of documentaries addressing fashion-world figures – one recalls Cecil Beaton quite recently getting the business – joining an already daunting heap of docs dedicated to artists, musicians, filmmakers and so forth, most of which are entirely watchable, and almost none of which offers any compelling reason for being. The prime appeal here, aside from scads of images of beautiful, cocaine-skinny youths in various stages of undress, is that of nostalgia for the brief idyll between the first major stirrings of gay liberation and the falling pall of the Aids crisis. The pleasure this provides necessarily depends on one's tolerance for rose-tinted recollection, and perhaps on generational membership – I'm not certain that anyone of 40 can take pleasure from tales of boomer hedonism, notwithstanding how colour-blind or liberationist or altogether lovely the participants were.

There is, of course, more to the story than the non-stop erotic cabaret, but it has been forgotten or elided, the only flashes of ill feeling that one catches sight of being some mild tetchiness between the rival camps of Karl Lagerfeld and Yves St Laurent and a brief bout of fisticuffs over a dinner table. Of Lopez's early years little is said, save for some speculation on the possible pain of his estrangement from his family, and little insight is offered into the private man. Instead, as he is seen floating through the chronicle of his life with imperturbable poise and glamour, our subject becomes an almost folkloric or mystical figure from the fairytale 1970s, a pop storybook many evidently can't get enough of.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Crump
Ronnie Sassoon
Written by
James Crump
Cinematography
Robert O'Haire
Edited by
Nick Tamburri
Sound Design
Rick Ash
Gary Gegan

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Production Company
Summitridge Pictures presents a film by James Crump
Executive Producer
Ronnie Sassoon
Film Extracts
L'Amour (1972)
King Kong (1976)
A View to a Kill (1985)
L'Amour fou (2010)
Saint Laurent (2014)
Diva (1981)
Andy Warhol A Documentary Film (2006)

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary portrait of Puerto Rico-born fashion illustrator and trendsetter Antonio Lopez, from his early days at the Fashion Institute of Technology to his recruitment by 'Women's Wear Daily' and subsequent rise to prominence in the city's fashion world. In New York, he and his close art-director collaborator Juan Ramos rub shoulders with Andy Warhol at Max's Kansas City. In Paris in the 1970s they become members of the coterie of Karl Lagerfeld, who is vying with Yves St Laurent for fashion supremacy. Throughout, the lusty bisexual Lopez is a prolific discoverer of female muses, among them Jessica Lange, Grace Jones, Tina Chow and Jerry Hall, to whom he was married in a mock ceremony in Jamaica. The arrival of the dissipated Jacques de Bascher at Lagerfeld's side breaks up the group, and by the 1980s the Aids epidemic has begun to devastate the decadent disco scene that Lopez so loved. He succumbs to the disease in Los Angeles in 1987, aged 44.

His life story is told by a collection of friends and admirers, including photographer Bill Cunningham, one-time French 'Vogue' editor Joan Juliet Buck and muses Lange, Pat Cleveland and Grace Coddington.

Around India with a Movie Camera

United Kingdom 2018, Director: Sandhya Suri

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

Sandhya Suri's previous feature, *I for India* (2005), explored post-war Indian migration to the UK through an unusual archive: not just the Super 8 films and reel-to-reel tapes with which her father, a medical student, documented his new country, but the recordings made by the family he'd left behind in 1965. It was a richly meditative work – at times droll, for long stretches a drift through postcolonial melancholia – that eschewed finger-wagging polemic or lapel-tugging 'human interest' storytelling of the kind refined in the popular *Who Do You Think You Are?* television series.

The same is true of *Around India with a Movie Camera*. Supported by the British Council, and part of a UK/India Year of Culture initiative, this could easily have been a heartwarming work of cinematic diplomacy that saluted the road to independence. It's altogether stranger and more elusive, beginning in 1899 with what it claims is the oldest depiction of the country on film: *Panorama of Calcutta, India, from the River Ganges*. This is an eerily tranquil work, a distant ancestor of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986), its flotational pacing and imagery evoking a nation that is as much dreamscape as real. It shows rickety shelters, constructed to protect bank-dwellers from the sun, that resemble satellite dishes. There's a dissonance here: this is clearly the past, yet it's a past that looks almost modern, a past that refuses to know its place. Even the term 'panorama' feels wrong; Suri, intentionally or otherwise, turns us into what Allan Sekula, in his landmark book *Fish Story* (later the basis for the 2010 essay film *The Forgotten Space*), called "a mobile spectator, more inquisitive than acquisitive, a crypto-cartographer". Other films excerpted have the word 'glimpse' in their title; one is called *Through the Back Door into India*; a number appeal to the ethnographic gaze. Suri makes us rightly self-conscious about the act of watching.

Cameras were, at least as much as pens, tools of empire. Their job was not just to chronicle life under the benevolent Raj, but also to reaffirm the rightness of imperialism itself. This means that there is little footage of rebellion or resistance – a notable exception being a 1911 clip of the Gaekwar of Baroda (sic) turning his back on George V at the grand Delhi Durbar. But Suri has an ironic sensibility that allows her to create subtle sequences – such as one showing westerners awkwardly straddling elephants – that evoke instability rather than mastery. Another clip shows the pomp of a stately procession which, when it ends, is replaced by the swarming energy of daily life; empire, it's implied, may have introduced modernity to India – but equally it may have been a force for petrification.

Philip Scheffner's *The Halfmoon Files* (2007), a remarkable 'ghost story' about Indian POWs interned at a German camp during WWI, made telling use of silence and black leader to draw attention to the gaps and imponderables in his narrative; Suri, echoing the work of Bill Morrison, includes a good deal of pocked and decaying film. She also features extraordinarily vivid footage of a lion fighting a tiger in a pit; *The Rollicking Rajah* (1914), in which an Englishman

Around India with a Movie Camera

in brownface, surrounded by female dancers, sings, "All the girls salaam the great Ram Jam/ The rollicking Rajah of Ranjipoo"; shorts whose makers applied coloured tints with stencils; and luridly Technicolor images of Indian performers that could have been shot by Derek Jarman.

The latter stages of Suri's film contain fascinating material: work by cinematographer Jack Cardiff; a short about the manufacture of kerosene tins directed by the great Bimal Roy; rare documentation of a peace mission undertaken by Gandhi in 1946; William MacQuitty's *19 Metre Band* (1941), an inside look at the General Overseas Service for Indian listeners, which argues that the BBC's Broadcasting House in London was "the most cosmopolitan building in Europe" and follows presenter Z.A. Bukhari as he wanders through the capital's street markets and listens to the orators at Speakers' Corner. He's a little dazed, but also thrilled by his journey. *Around India with a Movie Camera* may well produce the same effect on modern viewers.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Nicola Gallani
Edited by
Sandhya Suri
Original Music
Soumik Datta
Re-recording Mixer
Nikola Medic

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Production Companies
A BFI production with British Council for UK India 2017
The digitisation of India on Film: 1899-1947 is supported by Unlocking Film Heritage awarding funds from The National Lottery
Executive Producers
Robin Baker
Conrad Bodman

In Colour and Black & White [1.33:1]

Distributor
BFI Distribution

Footage from more than 130 films about India and Indian life between 1899 and 1947, encompassing home movies, newsreels and travelogues. Accompanied by a newly composed score by sarod player Soumik Datta, the film proceeds in mostly chronological fashion, depicting the colonised nation as it moves closer to independence.

The Cloverfield Paradox

USA 2018
Director: Julius Onah

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

I'm not sure that it rises to the level of paradox, but the contrast between J.J. Abrams's respectful stewardship of legacy franchises and the wanton neglect of his own is certainly a puzzler, possibly requiring a Freudian explanation. As is well known, this third *Cloverfield* film, which like its belated 2016 predecessor has only the sketchiest relation to the 2008 original, was given a high-profile launch during the Super Bowl in February, its surprise Netflix release presented as something akin to the arrival of Beyoncé's *Beyoncé*. Plugged by Ava DuVernay on Twitter as going "straight to the people", it bypassed the troublesome critics, who had to watch it on their laptops like everyone else, without distributor-provided hospitality.

As is also well known, it instantly transpired that, unlike *Beyoncé*, *The Cloverfield Paradox* was in no sense a game changer. The film had been slated for theatrical release by Paramount this April; soon enough it was equally apparent why Paramount had cut its losses. The critics may have been bypassed, but the people had their say all over social media. It is less well known that, hype notwithstanding, it is not the first time this has happened: *The Man with the Iron Heart*, for example, almost as starry a film, was similarly yanked from the schedule and dumped on Netflix just a few months ago. No one was more interested in this chain of events than your reviewer, who had bid to review *The Cloverfield Paradox* more than a year ago, when it was first given an early 2017 release date as *The God Particle*.

Whatever the title, it should never have gone into production as scripted: the story itself is barely coherent, its component parts are frequently ridiculous, there is no narrative momentum and the dialogue is atrocious. Julius Onah's direction does nothing to allay these flaws. The score is terrible, and the special effects, while not exactly made for the small screen, would be no great shakes at any size. Earth is doomed,

Star trek: David Oyelowo, Gugu Mbatha-Raw

and an international team of astronauts aboard a space station are its last hope: if they can get a particle accelerator working up there, there will be free energy for all. They get the accelerator working all right, but it takes them halfway across the galaxy and merges their dimension with that of an almost identical parallel universe, creating all sorts of arbitrary problems. And by that time, not only have Germany and Russia taken Earth into an energy war, but the monsters from the first movie have arrived – possibly meaning that this film starts around 2006.

It's 70 years since the 'Paramount Decision', by which the US Supreme Court broke up the studio system. Few back then, mindful of the simultaneous rise of commercial television, would have bet on the long-term survival of the cinemas; which is to say that nothing is written. Could it be that Paramount set out to discredit another upstart rival, bloated with cash but clueless about spending it, by lumbering them with this rubbish?

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
J.J. Abrams
Lindsey Weber
Story
Oren Uziel
Doug Jung
Screenplay
Oren Uziel
Director of Photography
Dan Mindel
Edited by
Alan Baumgarten
Matt Evans
Rebecca Valente
Production Designer
Doug Meerdink
Music
Bear McCreary
Sound Mixer
Steven A. Morrow
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood
Visual Effects and Animation
Industrial Light & Magic
Visual Effects
Base FX
Atomic Fiction
Stunt Co-ordinator
Mike Massa

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Production Companies
Netflix & Paramount Pictures present a Bad Robot production
Executive Producers
Tommy Harper
Robert J. Dohrmann
Jon Cohen
Bryan Burk
Drew Goddard
Matt Reeves

Cast

Daniel Brühl
Schmidt
Elizabeth Debicki
Jensen
Aksel Hennie
Volkov
Gugu Mbatha-Raw
Eva Hamilton
Chris O'Dowd
Mundy
John Ortiz
Monk
David Oyelowo
Kiel
Zhang Ziyi
Tam
Roger Davies
Michael
Clover Nee
Molly

Dolby Atmos
In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Netflix

Not submitted for theatrical classification
VOD certificate: 15
Running time: 102m 25s

An energy crisis is pushing Earth towards war. Astronaut Eva Hamilton, grieving for the loss of her children in a fire, leaves behind partner Michael to join the Cloverfield space station. Aboard is the Shepard particle accelerator, which if successfully tested will provide free energy for all. After two years, no progress has been made and Russia has invaded Germany, heightening tensions among the multinational crew. When a successful test is carried out, it seems to make Earth disappear. In fact, the Shepard has torn a hole between two dimensions, with various repercussions, including the arrival on the Cloverfield of Jensen, who belongs to a parallel universe in which she is Eva's friend.

Meanwhile, on Earth, amid unexplained explosions, Michael rescues a young girl from the wreckage of the hospital where he works, and takes her to a bunker. The Cloverfield crew struggle to survive the dimension breach; they eventually fix the engines and determine to fire the Shepard again in order to unscramble the two dimensions. Eva vows to help, but wishes to stay in Jensen's dimension, where her children are still alive. Jensen, however, tries to sabotage the mission so that she can steal the Shepard technology. Eva decides to kill Jensen and stay in her own dimension. She sends a message to her alternate-dimension self, telling her not to let her children die, before bailing out in an escape pod, which lands near a giant monster.

The 15:17 to Paris

USA/United Kingdom 2018
Director: Clint Eastwood
Certificate 15 93m 44s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Clint Eastwood's ambling docudrama *The 15:17 to Paris* covers quite a lot of territory, following its three leads from preadolescence to young manhood, from suburban Sacramento to Texas boot camp to a grand tour of continental Europe. Throughout these peregrinations, the matter of statistics keeps cropping up. Early on, when the men are still rabble-rousing boys, we see two of their single mothers (Judy Greer and Jenna Fischer) bridle at an educator's suggestion that statistics show the boys to be at greater risk as the products of broken homes. The film's primary identification character, Spencer Stone, will be lectured in a job-training programme on the importance of crunching numbers in any line of work, including the one he aspires to, the military – and it's only a disappointing score on a depth-perception test that keeps him from joining his preferred paramedic branch of service. Finally, after Stone and his friends Anthony Sadler and Alek Skarlatos have taken down a would-be terrorist shooter on a train hurtling between Amsterdam and Paris, Skarlatos observes that they were saved from almost certain death when a bullet jammed in the assailant's AKM assault rifle – a "one in a million" chance.

The 15:17 to Paris reproduces these real-life events, which occurred on Thalys train 9364 on 21 August 2015, and uses the actual American participants – Stone, Sadler and Skarlatos, amateurs all of them – as its leads, playing themselves. The odds of this 'working' as a movie are probably quite a bit less than one in 1,000, and the final film doesn't beat them, exactly – but that doesn't mean it isn't one of the more chancy and fascinating experiments to appear on multiplex screens in many moons. If one were looking to situate it, thematically, in Eastwood's filmography, it slots rather neatly between the recent *Sully* (2016) and *American Sniper* (2014) in its reflection of how a lifetime's training can be called upon in a single defining moment of action, and *Gran Torino* (2008), another movie with a largely inexperienced cast.

Gran Torino's particular frissons were achieved thanks to the fact that the only truly famous face in the movie belonged to one of the most famous men living, Eastwood himself – who has a kind of cameo in *The 15:17 to Paris*, his image gracing a T-shirt worn by Stone. Here there's no superstar safety net, and the boys called on to carry the movie are none of them naturals, as is evidenced in the cagey 'casual' way they nip at their numerous prop beers. Their very awkwardness, however, creates effects that transcend categories of good or bad acting. Their amateurishness is touching; you may even find yourself pulling for them to negotiate each scene without slipping up too badly. The rapport has the quality of that in a backyard production made by childhood friends, and Eastwood's casting gambit ultimately opens the movie up to interpretation as a contemplation of masculinity as performance – a very Mailerian prospect. ("It's Eastwood's *Wild 90*!" I found myself enthusing to friends when leaving the cinema in a daze.)

The movie's eccentricity doesn't end with the casting. Eastwood, working from a script by Dorothy Blyskal, makes strange, seemingly intuitive decisions throughout – there's a training montage, for example, set to what sounds like a drill sergeant's inspirational monologue about "the struggle", but the speaker is never introduced or identified. The movie hopscotches about on its timeline, as shards of the train attack periodically slice through the linear narrative. When the attack scene finally unfolds in full, it's savagely staged and very effective, all the more shocking in its brutality because of how disarmingly gentle the preceding vignettes of the boys horsing around in European capitals have been – one really feels the precariousness of things here, how little separates the quotidian from catastrophe. We do get some prior indications that this is a dark and violent world – Stone trains as a paramedic on an alarmingly realistic medical mannequin with bleeding, rent-asunder limbs, and on his military base there's a false alarm of an active shooter.

The better part of the movie, however, is dedicated to purely commonplace minutiae: wielding selfie sticks, picking up girls, swooning over hazelnut gelato. Tom Stern, Eastwood's regular cinematographer since *Blood Work* (2002), covers this material with a meandering widescreen frame, a good format for high-speed trains and ranch-style houses; the movie's homefront America is a blandscape of churches and Jamba Juices, and in such an environment the allure of enlistment doesn't need to be overemphasised.

Loose in Europe, the boys are especially endearing as they strain to appreciate the antiquity around them, aggressively ordinary lads who will be called on to perform an extraordinary duty. With this we touch on one of the paradoxes that defines Eastwood, a filmmaker of rather average talent who, through dint of work ethic, attention and instinct, has made several more good-to-great films than have many geniuses. With *The 15:17 to Paris*, he has added another to the collection. S

Gamechangers on a train: Alek Skarlatos, Anthony Sadler, Spencer Stone

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Clint Eastwood
Tim Moore
Kristina Rivera
Jessica Meier
Screenplay
Dorothy Blyskal
Based on the book by Dorothy Blyskal, Anthony Sadler, Alek Skarlatos, Spencer Stone, Jeffrey E. Stern
Director of Photography
Tom Stern
Edited by
Blu Murray
Production Designed by
Kevin Ishioka
Music
Christian Jacob
Supervising Sound Editor
Alan Robert Murray
Jason King
Costumes Designed by
Deborah Hopper
Stunt Co-ordinators
Patrick Vo
Grant Roberts
Yan Dron

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Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents
in association with
Village Roadshow Pictures a Malpaso production
In association with Access Entertainment and Dune Entertainment
Executive Producer
Bruce Berman

Cast

Anthony Sadler
Alek Skarlatos
Spencer Stone
themselves
Judy Greer
Joyce
Jenna Fischer
Heidi
P.J. Byrne
Mr Henry
Tony Hale
Coach Murray
Thomas Lennon
Principal Michael Akers
William Jennings
Spencer aged 11 to 14
Bryce Gheisar
Alek aged 11 to 14
Paul-Mikél Williams
Anthony aged 11 to 14

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Sacramento, California, in 2005, a Paris-bound train in 2015, and various points in between. In 2015, Gunman Ayoub El Khazzani prepares to make an attack on the train, a scene returned to throughout the film.

In Sacramento, Anthony Sadler drives through town with Spencer Stone and Alek Skarlatos and recounts his long-time friendship with both, casting the action back ten years to when they were all troublemaking classmates at a Christian school. Skarlatos moves away, but the three stay in touch. Both Stone and Skarlatos go into the armed services; the former undergoes a rigorous training programme with the aim of becoming a paramedic, while the latter goes on an uneventful tour of duty in Afghanistan. They plan to reunite with Sadler on a group trip to Europe. Skarlatos hooks up with a girlfriend in Berlin; Stone and Sadler travel through Italy and Amsterdam, where Skarlatos meets them, and where they plan after some debate to proceed to Paris.

On the train, a passenger wrestles the automatic rifle away from El Khazzani, only for the gunman to shoot him in the back with a 9mm pistol. El Khazzani, having retrieved his rifle, is rushed by Stone, who tackles him and is stabbed multiple times. Stone, Sadler and Skarlatos subdue the assailant, then treat the wounded passenger. They are subsequently awarded the Légion d'honneur by grateful French president François Hollande.

Fifty Shades Freed

USA/Japan 2018
Director: James Foley
Certificate 18 105m 20s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

"A bad day with you is better than a good day with someone else" is one of the most pernicious lies a woman can believe, for it's tied up in the puritanical view that there is only one true love out there for each of us, and that if a woman is unable to abide her darling's bullshit (*and* prefers something pleasurable over it), she'll be doomed to be alone for ever. In *50 Shades Freed*, we get the now married Anastasia having bad days with Christian Grey in a variety of palatial locales: the French Riviera, Paris, an Aspen chalet, a gothic mansion near Puget Sound, their soulless Seattle penthouse. Following the 'freedom' in the title, there's always another place or car or plane for Christian to surprise his new bride with – everything is always new.

This is meant to be part of Christian's mystery, but in is fact it's part of the unspoken game of the series: he'll bask in her childlike wonder about something, and then start dictating her behaviour. Since there's no feeling of playfulness or true sense of consent in this dynamic, the Greys' relationship often feels like a gruelling realisation of Ephesians 5:22-24 ("Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord") rather than a pop entertainment with some BDSM sex scenes thrown in. (Thankfully, the incredibly stupid dialogue provides a few moments of levity, more if you're really committed to cackling all the way through.)

Although some critics have argued that Ana's resistance to Christian's orders is proof of her agency, the couple's attempts to talk it out go nowhere in this instalment. Worse, her 'disobedience' more often than not leads to trouble: when she opts to get drinks with a friend instead of going straight home as Christian has told her to, Jack Hyde, her malevolent former boss, attacks her with a knife.

Although this revenge plot is more believable than Ana being promoted to editor while on her honeymoon, it is stretched out over so much screen time that it eventually eclipses the sex and romance sections. (*Freed* concludes with a montage of footage from the previous two

Balcony scene: Jamie Dornan, Dakota Johnson

films, which reasserts the romance and also drives home how lazily padded out this thing is.) While it's clear that the threat Hyde poses to the Greys is meant to test their new bond and see if it's *really* for ever, the big action set pieces feel more like car commercials than life-or-death chases. Hyde's perpetually red-rimmed eyes – as if he's just been Maced – don't really up the ante either; it seems that the snake in this upscale Eden was drawn by Hanna-Barbera. In the end, however, it's Ana's horrible beating by Hyde that finally makes Christian drop his guard and accept fatherhood. (Ana forgot to get her Depo-Provera shot – even pregnancy is her fault in the fucked-up world of *Shades*.)

As in the previous instalments, Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson's meagre chemistry can't hide the utterly vanilla 'naughtiness' of the sex we are allowed to see. There's a lightning-quick sequence involving a glass butt-plug (oh, wow), but many others eschew toys and whips in favour of missionary screwing. Relationships involve compromise and patience, but *50 Shades Freed* is a totally selfish lover who will never give you what you want, so just move along.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael De Luca
E L James
Dana Brunetti
Marcus Viscidi
Screenplay
Niall Leonard
Based on the novel by E L James
Director of Photography
John Schwartzman
Editors
Richard Francis-Bruce
Debra Neil-Fisher
David Clark
Production Designer
Nelson Coates
Music by/Score Produced by
Danny Elfman
Re-recording Mixers
Jon Taylor
Frank A. Montaño
Costume Designer
Shay Cunliffe

©Universal Studios

Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Michael De Luca production
A James Foley film
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc.

Cast
Dakota Johnson
Anastasia Grey, 'Ana'
Jamie Dornan
Christian Grey
Eric Johnson
Jack Hyde
Eloise Mumford
Kate Kavanagh
Rita Ora
Mia Grey
Luke Grimes
Elliot Grey
Victor Rasuk
José Rodriguez
Max Martini
Jason Taylor
Jennifer Ehle
Carla
Marcia Gay Harden
Grace Grey
Bruce Altman
Jerry Roach
Arielle Kebbel
Gia Matteo
Callum Keith Rennie
Ray Steele
Robinne Lee
Ros Bailey
Brant Daugherty
Sawyer

Dolby Atmos/ Auro11.1
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Seattle, the present. Christian Grey and Anastasia honeymoon in France following their wedding. Back in Seattle, a masked man – later revealed to be Ana's former boss Jack Hyde – sneaks into Grey Enterprises and blows up the server room. Christian arranges for security for Ana when they return home. While the Greys are in Puget Sound to view a new mansion, their car is followed; Ana manages to shake off their pursuer. After work one evening, she meets with her friend Kate instead of going straight home as Christian had told her to. Arriving home later, she is ambushed by Hyde, who is subsequently given probation. The Greys go to Aspen with friends. Ana discovers that she's pregnant. Christian runs out on her and meets up with former lover Elena, infuriating Ana. At work, she gets a call from Hyde, who has kidnapped Christian's sister. Ana takes him the $5 million ransom; Christian follows her. Hyde beats up Ana, but she shoots him in the leg before passing out. At the hospital, Ana is given the all clear; Christian accepts her pregnancy.

Several years later, Ana is pregnant again.

Gholam

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Mitra Tabrizian
Certificate 15 94m 31s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The humble taxi is developing its own iconography within Iranian cinema, where both Abbas Kiarostami's *Ten* (2002) and Jafar Panahi's *Taxi Tehran* (2015) have established the moving vehicle as valuable private space within a seemingly oppressive culture. *Gholam*, an enterprising first feature from noted London-based Iranian photographer and academic Mitra Tabrizian, takes that particular image and runs with it, since the driver in this instance, working the nightly trade in the British capital, is an exiled Iranian for whom the cab isn't necessarily a sanctuary but a manifestation of his isolation. Crisscrossing the streets, he's a perennial outsider – can he find some connection with the city around him, or will the ache of exile eventually call him home?

There's a tacit assumption that the latter option is unlikely, since the protagonist circulates within a community of exiles – customers and staff at a Persian café, an Iranian intellectual running a garage, dissidents apparently planning political action from afar – all of whom are stuck where they are due to the unspoken realities of the Islamic Republic. Yet as Shahab Hosseini's absolutely mesmerising central performance makes clear, Gholam is quietly bristling at the non-life that's on offer to him, not content to be a hollow man. Decidedly prickly when it comes to moneyed clients treating him like a skivvy, he finds an outlet for his innate compassion by befriending a frail elderly black woman with an offer of a free lift home. It's a human connection that proves an unlikely conduit towards thriller territory, as he's soon stalking a gang of bully-boy white youths who've brought misery to her life. At the same time, there's also a semi-committed flirtation with the aforementioned dissident activists, the twin-track plotting presenting the protagonist with the choice of making a difference in London or in Tehran.

All of which makes the film sound

Death and taxis: Shahab Hosseini

more schematic than it really is, since the prevailing tone is one of ominous uncertainty, sustained to a large degree by the effective portrayal of London's hinterlands as sinister and indefinable; the tactic of withholding character and story information also has us on edge throughout, fearing what might be about to happen. Hosseini, best known as the increasingly angsty husband in Asghar Farhadi's *The Salesman* (2016), contributes significantly by suggesting a definite inner ferment, while deftly eschewing precise signposting.

Tonally, we're not too far from the distinctive yet hard-to-pin-down disquiet so evident in Tabrizian's 2005 photo series *Border* – the creative catalyst for the film – though it's fair to say that the adjustment to long-form narrative hasn't been completely flawless. The less patient viewer might well feel there's not quite enough incident to justify the feature length, while the characterisation is less sure outside the Iranian diaspora, with the aggressive white youths somewhat crudely drawn. Still, for a fresh eye on the subgenre of moody London suspenser, and a film suffused with feeling for those (like the filmmaker herself) marooned far from their roots, this is a distinctive and memorable undertaking – though it helps if you're attuned to its mood of enigmatic unease.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Zadoc Nava
Written by
Mitra Tabrizian
Cyrus Massoudi
Based on an original idea by
Mitra Tabrizian
Director of Photography
Dewald Aukema
Editor
Brand Thumim
Production Designer
Stéphane Collonge
Sound Recordist
Xan Marquez Caneda
Costume Designer
Stéphane Collonge

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Production Companies
Altara Pictures
and Aimimage
Executive Producers
Tom Goddard
Ali Pour
Mitra Tabrizian
Cyrus Massoudi
Ahmad Ahmadzadeh
Omid Danialzadeh

Cast
Shahab Hosseini
Gholam
Behrouz Behnejad
Mr Sharif
Nasser Memarzia
quiet man
Corinne Skinner-Carter
Mrs Green

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Miracle Communications

London, present day. Gholam, an exiled Iranian, drives a minicab by night, works at a car repair workshop by day and lives alone in a seedy bedsit. He takes a daily meal at his uncle's Persian café, where he worked prior to a falling-out – the quarrel is an ongoing topic of conversation in his mother's regular phone calls from Iran. She wants Gholam to come home, but he gives little away as to his plans. He attracts the attention of a couple of the café's expat Iranian regulars, one of whom claims to have served in the 1980s Iran-Iraq War, where the youthful Gholam was regarded as a hero. The duo are involved in dissident politics and have a plan to get Gholam back to Tehran to carry out a dangerous mission for them, though the latter is noncommittal. While he's not spending time alone and pondering his next move, Gholam befriends a frail elderly black woman, learning that her son was killed by racist white youths who escaped conviction. Gholam stalks the perpetrators, luring them to an alley near their pub hangout, where one of them is killed during an altercation. Gholam lies low in the aftermath, seeking shelter in the garage owner's modest home. Gholam is shot dead in the street – presumably by an associate of the white youths.

Have a Nice Day

People's Republic of China 2017
Director: Liu Jian
Certificate 15 77m 39s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

To nick a phrase from Jean Cocteau, *Have a Nice Day* (the Chinese title *Haojile* means 'Wonderful!' or 'The Best It Gets') is a full orchestration of the themes picked out with one hand on a piano in Liu Jian's feature debut *Piercing I* (*Citong Wo*, completed 2009, released 2010). Liu, an archetypal art-school graduate based in Nanjing, tells stories of working-class losers and wide-boys on the fringes of China's increasingly glitzy cities, using photorealist backdrops to intensify the sense that his convoluted tales have some weight as social criticism. *Have a Nice Day* is a great deal more convoluted than *Piercing I* – the synopsis below leaves out minor characters and subplots – and focuses on a wider range of social types and issues. Liu's technical skills in animation have come along nicely, and so have his cultural pretensions: the title's irony is underlined by an opening quote from Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (to the effect that nature will prevail despite mankind's best efforts to erase it), and the song over the closing credits namedrops the novels *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Jean-Christophe*. In between, the dialogue references various tech titans, both Chinese and American, and there's even a snatch of a Trump speech on a car radio.

It's not exactly a macguffin, but a black holdall stuffed with red 100RMB banknotes is the pivot around which all the plots turn. The dosh is being delivered from a gangster boss (first seen torturing an artist friend for having it off with the boss's wife) to a shadowy Buddhist monk who's getting cold feet about accepting such 'donations' when it's snatched on impulse by a young bodyguard to pay for a trip to a Korean clinic to salvage his fiancée's botched plastic surgery. It's snatched twice more, first by a crazed inventor with X-ray specs and then by his girlfriend, who turns out to be only one degree of separation from the disfigured fiancée. The one character who never gets his hands on it is the hitman (day job: market butcher) who's sent by the gang boss to get it back. Liu evidently likes

Bag of tricks: *Have a Nice Day*

endings in which different story strands converge, and here brings four carloads of characters to a crash site on a country highway to duke it out.

The proliferation of supporting characters and subplots and the speed with which Liu crosscuts between them make the main storyline sometimes quite hard to keep up with, and Liu anyway leaves us guessing how the gang boss came by the money in the first place and what the Buddhist monk wanted it for, not to mention why the brutal hitman is so unstoppable in his determination to get the job done. Actually, the narrative turns matter less than an underlying motif: almost every character is struggling to overcome some hard-luck story, and the film's most blackly comic moments are those when characters pause (usually just before someone clobbers them) to run through their personal misfortunes at length. That aside, it's all *noir* stylings and authentic Chinese grunge.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Yang Cheng
Liu Jian
Screenplay
Liu Jian
Concept
Liu Jian
Lynne Wang
Director of Photography
Lin Shan
Editor
Militia Xiaoliu
Art Director
Lai Baoer
Music
The Shanghai Restoration Project
Sound Director
Li Danfeng
Key Animation
Liu Jian

©Lejoy Animation Studio
Production Companies
NeZha Bros. Pictures, Lejoy Animation Studio
A film by Liu Jian Creation & Production: Lejoy Animation Studio
Executive Producers
Yang Cheng
Liu Jian
Lynne Wang

Cast
Zhu Changlong
Xiao Zhang
Cao Kai
Lao Zhao
Liu Jian
Fang Yuanjun
Yang Siming
Uncle Liu
Shi Haitao
A De
Ma Xiaofeng
Skinny
Xue Feng
Old 3
Zheng Yi
Second sister
Cao Kou
Yellow Eye
Zhu Hong
Ann Ann
Wang Da
Wu Lidu
Wu Yu
Yanzi's mom

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Mubi

Chinese theatrical title
Hao ji le

A city in China, 2017. Bodyguard Zhang snatches a bag of banknotes from Zhao and nervously rents a room in a decrepit hotel. News of the robbery reaches boss Liu and his henchman A De. Liu asks butcher/hitman Skinny to find Zhang. With help from a computer geek, Skinny hacks Zhang's social media, learns that he wants to fix his fiancée Yanzi's botched plastic surgery, and tracks him to the Integrity Internet Café. But inventor Yellow Eyes happens upon Zhang and the money and seizes both, only to be electrocuted trying to disable a speed camera; his girlfriend Second Sister takes the money. Skinny follows a lead to the hotel room and tells Zhang on WeChat to meet him there. Yanzi's friend Ann Ann and her boyfriend arrive, looking for Zhang, and are taken out by Skinny. Zhang eventually shows up and clashes with Skinny, managing to stab him. Second Sister runs into Zhao, who recognises the bag of money and tries to retrieve it; she makes him crash his car. Yellow Eyes recovers and heads for the hotel room, a scene of carnage. He carries the unconscious Zhang down to his car; Skinny, seriously wounded, follows. A De is driving Liu when he spots Zhao's crashed car and stops to investigate. Yellow Eyes also sees the crashed car and pulls up; he defeats A De with one of his inventions. Skinny also drives up, dying. Zhang revives and sees the money bag in Zhao's crashed car. It rains heavily.

Here to Be Heard
The Story of The Slits

United Kingdom 2017, Director: William E. Badgley

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

With unprecedented attention being paid to the treatment of women in the entertainment industry, it's an apposite time for this close-up of The Slits, still one of fairly few female-dominated groups to have acquired respect and status outside the realm of chart pop. Former band members, friends and commentators assess the messy rise and fall of a post-punk phenomenon set apart not only by gender but also by extreme youth (singer Ari Up was 14 at the time of The Slits' first gig) and defiant technical incompetence ("Sometimes we would be playing different songs, and we couldn't even tell!" recalls drummer Palmolive). The sheer snotty buoyancy of it all is enough to tug at the heart, especially because some of the cultural pressures against which The Slits were kicking seem so horribly unchanged. "We want to show girls you don't have to be pretty and skinny... You can just be who you are... You can be wild-looking people with personalities, and not stereotypes," bassist Tessa Pollitt reads aloud from an old magazine interview.

For the most part, however, the film is at its best when it gives space to the band members and their stories, and less effective when it attempts polemic about female emancipation. A repeated message that autonomous, self-determined and rebellious women did not exist in music prior to The Slits' first gig is bizarre, not only given the vast swathes of offscreen women that it snubs – from blueswomen to garage groups to singer-songwriters – but also because it ignores those women who enter its own narrative, including Chrissie Hynde, Siouxsie Sioux and Patti Smith. The idea that The Slits have been cruelly omitted from the annals of pop culture – in academic Vivien Goldman's words, "They were so firmly stamped from history! The herstory was erased!" – may also strike some as overplayed. Given that they made only two albums, both far from mainstream, we're arguably looking at an unusually celebrated and mythologised outfit, not an overlooked one.

These might have been fertile areas for the film to explore, had it chosen to do so – were The Slits really an unprecedented phenomenon? What is their legacy? But hyperbole tends to replace argument or analysis here, and scenarios convenient to the narrative are presented without supporting evidence. Goldman claims that the first album met with "hostility"; Pollitt that publications declined to review the record because the band looked "ugly" on the cover, only to subsequently suggest that other musicians

Slitting pretty: Tessa Pollitt, Viv Albertine

must have played on it; guitarist Viv Albertine that Island Records "chucked us off the label for no reason whatsoever". All credible enough on an anecdotal basis, but where's the rigour? Would it have been hard to dig for some archive material to back up the claims? Without it, there's an unavoidable hint of self-aggrandising melodrama.

It's not as if the film didn't have the space in its running time for more detail. Having wrapped up The Slits' first and most revered incarnation in rather short order, it devotes a surprising amount of time to the reformed version, which was put together by Up and Pollitt in 2005 and endured until the former's death from breast cancer in 2010. It's an abrupt and peculiar shift in focus; while the young musicians from the new outfit are charming, long interviews with them don't build on the film's earlier section. Nothing from Albertine, meanwhile, about the reformation, why she didn't participate in it, or Up's passing.

This odd deployment of interviewees and material gives the film a shaggy, uncertain feel that's frustrating – though arguably true to a shaggy, uncertain sort of cultural phenomenon. And stirring and touching moments do penetrate the rather murky storytelling. Pollitt is a wonderfully funny and self-deprecating screen companion; Palmolive's newly conservative self-presentation certainly does not dim her volubility or smarts; and even in archive footage, Ari Up's charisma leaps off the screen.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
William E. Badgley
Mark Vennis
Written by
William E. Badgley
Shot by
William E. Badgley
Edited by
William E. Badgley
Music
The Slits
Original Score
Von Wildenhaus
Re-recording Mixer
Patrick Janssen

Production Companies
Starcleaner in association with Moviehouse Entertainment and Head Gear Films present a Molasses Manifesto production
Executive Producers
Tessa Pollitt
Paloma McLardy
Jennifer Shagawat
John Driver
Gary Phillips
Christine Robertson
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

In Colour

Distributor
MusicFilmNetwork

A documentary in which Tessa Pollitt, former bassist for The Slits, looks through archive articles and shares memories about her time with the band, formed by drummer Palmolive in London in 1976. Members, managers and friends of The Slits recall the numerous changes of personnel and management that marked the band's early years and assess the impact that their chaotic approach to music and self-presentation had on pop culture. The Slits sign to Island Records, but are dropped after their first album. A second album proves a commercial failure, and the band split up in 1982. In 2005, Pollitt and singer Ari Up form a new line-up, which tours extensively until Up's death from cancer in 2010.

I Got Life!

France 2017
Director: Blandine Lenoir
Certificate 15 89m 27s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The second feature directed by actress-screenwriter Blandine Lenoir, *I Got Life!* is a warm-hearted, entertaining romantic comedy about ageing women. Agnès Jaoui plays Aurore, a divorced fiftysomething woman with two grown-up daughters, who is going through the menopause and simultaneously facing unemployment and the prospect of becoming a grandmother. In the middle of all this she meets, and falls for, an old flame, Christophe (Thibault de Montalembert), though he is at first uninterested in her.

I Got Life! belongs to the growing band of international movies devoted to 'mature' women (one thinks of several Meryl Streep and Diane Keaton titles), many scripted and/or directed by women, but its brand of romcom is very French in at least two ways.

First is the emphasis on motherhood. While Aurore's ex-husband appears as an amiable nonentity, her relationship with her daughters is intense, and several flashbacks show her ecstatically singing, dancing and playing with them as children. We also witness her loneliness after younger daughter Lucie (Lou Roy-Lecollinet) leaves home; and part of the plot revolves around the pregnancy of elder daughter Marina (Sarah Suco).

Second is the film's awkward relationship to feminism. Undoubtedly, *I Got Life!* celebrates women and female solidarity, mocks crass macho behaviour, deplores the fact that the daughters reproduce their mother's mistakes, and points to society's double standards when it comes to gender. The film even enlists feminist theory to drive the point home. In this respect, a rather self-conscious mini-lecture on intersectionality sticks out as unnecessary; more productive is the appearance of feminist anthropologist Françoise Héritier on a television programme. Aurore and a group of women look aghast as the scholar demonstrates how, in old-fashioned representations of the stages of life, men appear as independent entities, while women must be attached to men and children to exist.

The problem is that the film then goes on to reproduce just that configuration. There's no quarrel with Aurore being fulfilled by motherhood; but the thrust of the narrative is to make her seem incomplete until she finds a man (two, in fact). For all the film's jokes about middle-aged men falling for much younger women, both kind and romantic Hervé (Eric Viellard) and dashing Christophe miraculously buck the trend in their hot pursuit of Aurore. After the familiar romcom delaying tactics, Christophe supplies the romantic happy end.

What saves *I Got Life!* from sentimentality and predictability is its star. Jaoui, an accomplished director-actress, is magnificent throughout. As a warm, energetic, flesh-and-blood woman, attractive without being uncannily slim, competent and witty and yet struggling to find a place on the job market, she is inspiring and credible.

Rocky Aurore picture show: Agnès Jaoui

Just as in real life she transits seamlessly from popular movies and auteur films to the classics on stage, here she is equally at ease in romantic interludes and comic vignettes, whether she is patronised as a waitress, sweating with hot flushes or forced to do idiotic role-play at the job centre. We even get a glimpse of her considerable singing talent.

As social comedy, *I Got Life!* adroitly depicts a provincial milieu rarely seen on screen, one that is realistic without being miserable, attractive but not improbably so. The discreet addition of a few non-professional actors to the cast helps in this respect. It is a shame that Lenoir lacked the courage to opt for a less conventional romantic ending. However, there is much pleasure to be had in Jaoui's joyful performance, in the film's celebration of female solidarity and in its challenge to our culture's disparagement of older women. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Antoine Rein
Fabrice Goldstein
Screenplay
Blandine Lenoir
Jean-Luc Gaget
Based on an original idea by Blandine Lenoir
Adaptation/ Dialogue
Blandine Lenoir
Océane Rose Marie
Script Collaborators
Anne-Françoise Brillot
Benjamin Dupas
Agnès Jaoui
Photography
Pierre Milon
Editor
Stéphanie Araud
Art Director
Eric Bourgès
Original Music
Bertrand Belin
Sound Recordist
Dimitri Haulet
Costumes
Marie Le Garrec

©Karé Productions, France 3 Cinéma, CN2 Productions
Production Companies
Fabrice Goldstein and Antoine Rein present a Karé Productions, France 3 Cinéma co-production
With the participation of Canal+, OCS, France Télévisions, Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Département de la Charente-Maritime in partnership with the CNC
In association with Banque Postale Image 9, Cineventure 2, Cofimage 28, A Plus Image 7
A film by Blandine Lenoir
With the participation of Cinémage 10, Palatine Etoile 12
With the support of Procirep and Angoa
Film Extracts
A Star Is Born (1937)

Cast
Agnès Jaoui
Aurore Tabort
Thibault de Montalembert
Christophe Tochard, 'Totoche'
Pascale Arbillot
Mano
Sarah Suco
Marina
Lou Roy-Lecollinet
Lucie
Éric Viellard
Hervé

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

French theatrical title
Aurore

La Rochelle, France, present day. Fiftysomething divorcee Aurore lives with her younger daughter Lucie. She suffers with the effects of the menopause and endures sexist harassment from her boorish restaurant-owner boss, which leads her to quit and search for a new job. She argues with her pregnant elder daughter Marina. When former lover Christophe arrives in town, Aurore wants to start a relationship, but he turns her down for fear of being rejected a second time. Another concern for Aurore is that Lucie is leaving home to live with her boyfriend. Aurore finds a job as a cleaner at an unconventional retirement commune of older women. Through her best friend Mano, she meets Hervé, with whom she starts a relationship. However, a chance meeting with Christophe at a school reunion rekindles her interest, and she sends him a tape of his earlier professions of love. Both Lucie and Marina return to the family home. About to leave for a romantic weekend in Venice with Hervé, Aurore sees Christophe rushing to her house and abruptly changes her mind. Her passionate embrace with Christophe is interrupted by the news that Marina has gone into labour.

The Islands & the Whales

United Kingdom/USA/Sweden/Denmark 2016
Director: Mike Day
Certificate 12A 80m 39s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

There is, in *The Islands and the Whales*, a lot of talk of *Huldufólk* – a race of ancient elven creatures, indigenous to the Faroe Islands, who are said to have lived at one with nature but have, along with their fellow "mermaids, sea monsters and mermen", long since retreated before the encroachment of modernity on the archipelago.

The myth of the *Huldufólk* serves to frame many of the tensions that Mike Day's documentary explores: the clash between nature and technology, and between tradition and overwhelming change. For, living in isolation, the human population of the Faroes have been hunting fish, whales and seabirds for as long as anyone can remember, both as a source of necessary sustenance (in cold, rocky terrain that will not support crops) and also as an inveterate part of their communal sense of identity.

Without ever revelling in the cull, Day certainly doesn't flinch from the realities of a drive hunt – the boats corralling pods of pilot whales into shore, the rush of islanders to slaughter the trapped mammals, the bay turned red with blood, the tools used for killing and dragging and flensing. But he is also at pains to depict these hunts very much as a communal activity, in which cooperation is central and the sharing-out of the catch highly organised (and accepted by all). Indeed, as a whale is butchered, townspeople gather and sing. Likewise Day, revisiting the subject of his 2011 documentary debut *The Guga Hunters of Ness*, shows without sentimentality the hunting of gannets (as well as fulmars and puffins), while certainly emphasising its cooperative and community-building spirit. We see how, in order to get to the gannets' nesting place on a perilous cliff face, each hunter must depend on 12 others to lower him by rope – and the birds are then divided evenly between the participants.

Whaling has become a highly controversial activity, something that Day acknowledges by documenting the arrival of international anti-whaling group Sea Shepherd (fronted, surreally, by *Baywatch*'s Pamela Anderson, looking very out of place in this frosty environment). Yet the Faroese prove highly effective in their resistance to such groups' attempts to lecture them or even intervene in local practices.

However, a different kind of outside influence, as hidden as the *Huldufólk*, is doing far more damage to the islands' hunting culture: global pollution, flooding the food chain with so much mercury that whale meat is now poisoning the human population. A long-term study by local professor Pál Weihe conclusively shows the deleterious effects – but even when confronted with the dangerous concentration of toxins in his own body, fisherman Bárður Isaksen continues not only eating blubber himself but also feeding it to his young daughters. It is a kind of denial familiar from the smokers of several decades ago, or today's champions of fossil fuels and unlimited consumption – which makes the present plight of these islands a microcosm for a whole world (or, as one fisherman puts it, "a barometer for the rest of the planet") that refuses to face up to its own devastating impacts on the environment, ruining livelihoods and even lives in its destructive

This island earth: *The Islands & the Whales*

wake. Meanwhile, as plankton and fish are dying out, the islands' migratory birds – another important food source for locals – are left with nothing to eat, leading to a dramatic, probably irreversible reduction in their population.

Also serving as cinematographer (with a tiny crew), Day captures the Faroe Islands' sparse and beautiful landscapes in wide shot, while coming into intimate proximity with his human subjects – Weihe, Isaksen and his family, several other hunters, local puffin expert Dr Jens-Kjeld Jensen – and letting them tell their own stories of a culture, not to mention of many species, being driven over the edge to extinction. What emerges is a nuanced dialectic on a human-driven situation, both local and global, that is no longer sustainable, as well as a portrait of a very particular community in crisis. If its title promises a fable, *The Islands and the Whales* shows a whole society struggling to maintain the status quo of its own mythology.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mike Day
Cinematography
Mike Day
Edited by
Mary Lampson
Nicola Halova
Mike Day
Claire Ferguson
David Charap
Original Music
Antony Partos
Mike Sheridan
Sound Recording
Nathaniel
Robin Mann
Dom Corbisiero
Carolina Petro
Sakaris Stora
Peter Storm Wich
Penny Vocniak
Magda Dragan
Napoleon Smith

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Production Companies
Supported by a grant from Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with support from Open Society Foundation & Ford Foundation Justfilms
Developed with the support of Initialize Films & Scottish Documentary Institute's Interdoc Plus Programme supported by Creative Scotland
Developed with the support of Influence Film Foundation, Creative Europe EDN Co-production Workshop Twelve for the Future Factum Foundation for Digital Technology
Produced in association with The San Francisco Film Society Documentary Film Fund
Produced with the support of Danish Film Institute
Supported by Wellcome Trust
Produced with the support of The Filmmaker Fund
Developed and supported by The National Lottery through Creative Scotland
Produced by Intrepid Cinema
A film by Mike Day
Executive Producers
Minette Nelson
David Eckles
Leslie Finlay
Rachel Wexler
Jez Lewis

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Cosmic Cat Film

A documentary filmed in the Faroe Islands. The local community, whose identity and culture are rooted in traditional hunting for whales and seabirds, are buffeted on one side by international anti-whaling groups and on the other by the mercury pollution that is spreading through the food chain and into the whale meat, wreaking toxic damage on the human populace. Denial vies with fatalism.

Isle of Dogs

USA/Germany 2018
Director: Wes Anderson

Experiment in terriers: *Isle of Dogs*

See Feature on page 22

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Many auteur directors create films that seem to exist in pocket universes as self-contained, circumscribed and minutely thought-through as the virtual-reality environment of a computer game or the fantasy setting of a paperback trilogy. Wes Anderson's early films *Bottle Rocket* (1996) and *Rushmore* (1998) took place in more or less the real world, but concerned fantasists who tried to make their imaginings concrete (or at least papier-mâché) reality. Since then, he has voyaged deeper into the universes created for each of his films and found avatars in visionaries and explorers like Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), the schoolboy theatrical impresario of *Rushmore*, and Steve Zissou (Bill Murray), the Jacques Cousteau figure in *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) was set on an imaginary island and came – like every fantasy trilogy since Tolkien – with an invented map. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), a Russian doll of shaggy-dog stories, embedded human eccentrics in an imaginary institution (and country) visited over decades. Anderson's secondary worlds aren't permanent idylls but places in the throes of sometimes cataclysmic change. With *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009), Anderson's earlier venture into stop-motion animation (and his only film based on a pre-existing source), the director was at last able to control all the variables – in this mode, every single throwaway prop has to be made from scratch.

Isle of Dogs – set in a near-future Japan, where the mayor of Megasaki has ordered that all the city's dogs be exiled to an offshore refuse dump – shows the influence of everyone in the field from Jan Svankmajer to Nick Park, and makes extensive use of a quirk discovered by Willis H. O'Brien on *King Kong* (1933) – that the animators' fingers cause furry puppets to ripple in a manner approximating a constant light breeze. Even more than most of Anderson's films, *Isle of Dogs* will attract repeat viewings because it is so densely packed with sly visual gags and quietly hilarious minor characters (such as Tilda Swinton's Oracle Dog, whose mystic reputation is down to quoting TV news headlines as if they were prophecies) that a single watch won't pick up half the prizes. Many one-off images are startlingly beautiful, yet oddly melancholy, often finding fascinating things to see in literal detritus – the aftermath of a plane crash on a sea of waste paper, with the wreck at the centre of a burned circle... or the clouds of dust kicked up whenever animals or humans need to have an old-fashioned cartoon-style mêlée.

Like Guy Maddin (*The Forbidden Room*) and Anna Biller (*The Love Witch*), Anderson often looks to an eclectic variety of film sources, making collages out of unlikely bits and pieces of popular and high culture. Here, the dominant influence is Japanese cinema, with explicit nods to Kurosawa (music stings and *bushido* cool from *Seven Samurai* and echoes of the rubbish-dump community of *Dodes'ka-den*) and the science-fiction films of Honda Ishiro (with the space-suited boy pilot and steel-frilled mecha-dogs). But in having dogs as most of the main (and anglophone) characters, Anderson can't avoid evoking *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1960), albeit with the analogues of show dog Lady and street dog Tramp – voiced by Scarlett Johansson and Bryan Cranston – conducting themselves like the mysterious, slightly fey outlaws of Suzuki Seijun's films. A supporting pack of wry, chatty cast-off dogs (voiced by Anderson regulars Murray, Ed Norton, Bob Balaban and Jeff Goldblum) come across as canine versions of the crews of mostly merry misfits of *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic*.

Like many Anderson films, *Isle of Dogs* has a non-linear story, an omniscient narrator (Courtney B. Vance), onscreen chapter headings and an array of distancing devices

– all the Japanese characters speak mostly in unsubtitled Japanese, but translators and translation devices pop up to keep the audience up to date – which theoretically draw attention to the packaging rather than the contents. However, this is such a labour of love, drawing so much from its creator's enthusiasm for all manner of things – not least, of course, dogs – that it avoids disappearing inside its magnificent artifice. A speech that Cranston's stray Chief gives about literally biting the hand that fed him when he muffed a chance at a good home is among the most perfectly written, staged and played scenes in recent cinema – it would be a surefire Oscar clip if awards had categories that could encompass achievements in this byway of cinema, where great acting is as much down to the hands of animators as the dialogue delivery. The trick of absurdist comedy is often to know when to take an element (here emotional, but elsewhere in the film political) so seriously that it hits home without even abandoning a fundamental ridiculousness – which turns out to be a profound reaction to the state of the real world.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Wes Anderson
Scott Rudin
Steven Rales
Jeremy Dawson
Screenplay
Wes Anderson
Story
Wes Anderson
Roman Coppola
Jason Schwartzman
Nomura Kunichi
Director of Photography
Tristan Oliver
Editors
Ralph Foster
Edward Bursch
Production Designers
Adam Stockhausen
Paul Harrod
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Animator Director
Mark Waring

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures and Indian Paintbrush present an American Empirical Picture by Wes Anderson
Executive Producers
Christoph Fisser
Henning Molfenter
Charlie Woebcken
In association with Studio Babelsberg Film

Supported by FFA, MBB

Voice Cast

Bryan Cranston
Chief
Edward Norton
Rex
Bill Murray
Boss
Jeff Goldblum
Duke
Rankin Koyu
Kobayashi Atari
Liev Schreiber
Spots
Bob Balaban
King
Scarlett Johansson
Nutmeg
Nomura Kunichi
Mayor Kobayashi
F. Murray Abraham
Jupiter
Watanabe Ken
Greta Gerwig
Frances McDormand
Courtney B. Vance
Fisher Stevens
Murakami Nijiro
Harvey Keitel
Tilda Swinton
Ito Akira
Takayama Akira
Noda Yojiro
Natsuki Mari
Ono Yoko
Frank Wood

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Megasaki City, Japan, the near future. After an outbreak of a new canine disease, fanatically anti-dog Mayor Kobayashi exiles all the city's dogs to Trash Island, an offshore refuse dump. Atari, the mayor's 12-year-old ward, pilots a small plane to the island in the hope of rescuing Spots, his loyal dog bodyguard. Atari is helped in his quest by a pack of dogs, including Chief, a stray who doesn't believe in masters and turns out to be Spots's brother. American exchange student Tracy investigates and discovers that Kobayashi spread the synthetic plague in the first place and has murdered a professor who devised a cure. Atari finds Spots, who is now a leader in the dog community. Chief becomes Atari's dog, leaving Spots free to lead the other dogs. Tracy distributes the cure and Kobayashi's crimes are exposed just as he is re-elected. In a melée, Atari is wounded and the shamed mayor donates a kidney to save his life. An arcane law of succession makes Atari the new mayor. Dogs are welcomed back to the city.

Journeyman

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Paddy Considine

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The greatest boxing pictures, such as Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) and Huston's *Fat City* (1972), are of course as much about masculine frailty as about manly potency, and after his excoriating portrait of a bullying wife-beater in 2011's *Tyrannosaur*, Paddy Considine's second feature as writer-director uses a stricken former champion to illuminate the underlying vulnerability behind the chest-pumping and flashing fists.

This time Considine also takes the central role of middleweight fighter Matty Burton, a journeyman pro who has finally landed a world title, and his writing and direction shape a showcase for what is a remarkable performance. It's his crafting of the non-verbal aspects of his portrayal that really grab the attention: there's something around the eyes suggesting an inhibiting fear seeping into his psyche as he prepares to face Anthony Welsh's fierce, brash contender in his first defence. This pays off when he takes the attritional bout on points but collapses afterwards with a serious head injury, prompting Considine to create what is virtually a new character as the brain-damaged champ is reduced from alpha male to childlike dependent, his memory ravaged and his physicality significantly impaired. He moves his hands as if trying to put his finger on some unresolvable quandary, and clucks his tongue to illustrate an encompassing hesitancy of thought – but it's the middle-distance stare of a man isolated within the detritus of lost connections that ultimately proves so unsettling and affecting.

Considine's sterling contribution certainly brings out the best in Jodie Whittaker as Matty's wife Emma, who shades in a whole spectrum of love, fear and frustration while keeping her emotions hidden from her stricken husband. So powerful are their scenes together that when they're not on screen, it somehow underlines the abiding issues in the film's dramatic

Cornered: Paddy Considine

construction. Though it opens, for instance, with home video of communal bonhomie as Matty celebrates his championship victory, Emma subsequently seems to be without friends or family, and Matty's desertion by his ring crew after his injury is an unconvincing dramatic convenience. Furthermore, when injury reduces the protagonist to a more or less passive figure reliant on the help of others, the narrative rather runs out of steam, lacking some key development to enliven the third act, which plays out along predictable lines and is notably forgiving towards the sport that has taken away as much as it's given. The point is forcefully made that Matty's transformed condition allows him to realise that his wife and child are the most important things in his life, but once he's bared his heart, the film has pretty much said what it has to say.

With Laurie Rose's cinematography delivering bright, sharp visuals that ultimately prove somewhat antiseptic, *Journeyman* in the end offers a couple of brilliant performances in search of a movie to do them justice. Hopefully, Considine the filmmaker can learn from this and take a more considered, fully developed approach next time round. As a performer, though, he's certainly hit the heights already.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Diarmid Scrimshaw
Written by
Paddy Considine
Director of Photography
Laurie Rose
Editor
Pia di Ciaula
Production Designer
Simon Rogers
Original Music
Harry Escott
Sound Recordist
William Whale
Costume Designer
Suzanne Cave
Stunt Co-ordinator
Abbi Collins
Fight Choreographer
Paul Donnelly

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Production Companies
Film4, Screen Yorkshire and BFI present in association with the Wellcome Trust and Studiocanal an Inflammable Films production
A Paddy Considine film
Developed in association with Film4
Journeyman Films Limited has been supported by the Yorkshire Content Fund
Made with the Support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Lizzie Francke
Rose Garnett
David Kosse
Hugo Heppell
Meroë Candy
Danny Perkins
Jenny Borgars
Mark Gooder
Alison Thompson

Cast

Paddy Considine
Matty Burton
Jodie Whittaker
Emma Burton
Anthony Welsh
Andre Bryte
Tony Pitts
Richie
Paul Popplewell
Jackie
Steve Bunce
boxing interviewer

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

The Midlands, present day. Boxer Matty Burton celebrates winning the middleweight world title with a party for family and friends. By the time of his first defence, however, he has lost his father, and while his domestic life with wife Emma and baby Mia is seemingly blissful, an acrimonious press conference with brash rival Andre Bryte hints at Matty's ebbing confidence. He wins his match against Bryte on points, but after returning home to a relieved Emma he collapses from a head injury received during the fight. On his release from hospital after brain surgery, he is a changed man, with significant loss of speech, memory and personality. Emma is now a carer for a childlike husband, whose frustrations manifest themselves in violence against her. She leaves with the baby, and Matty's ring crew Richie and Jackie, who'd previously deserted him, step in to look after him following a suicide attempt in the local river. They get him training again to restore some confidence and pride, while a shocked Bryte visits him at home to apologise, even though Matty's memory of the fight is foggy. In an emotional phone call, Matty re-establishes contact with Emma. His crew organise a gala fundraising evening, where Matty gives a speech refusing to blame boxing or Bryte and reaffirming his love for his wife. He and Emma are reunited. Emma returns home, and a recuperating Matty finds a new role for himself supervising the youngsters at his local boxing club.

Mark Felt The Man Who Brought Down the White House

USA/People's Republic of China/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Peter Landesman
Certificate 12A 102m 49s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Following close on Steven Spielberg's unofficial prequel to *All the President's Men* (1976), *The Post*, Peter Landesman brings us an alternative-view account of the events of Alan J. Pakula's film: the Watergate affair through the eyes of the shadowy informant whom *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward nicknamed 'Deep Throat'. In 2005, three years before his death, Mark Felt, former associate director of the FBI, finally admitted that he had been 'Deep Throat'; rumours to that effect had been circulating for years.

Landesman's script, drawing on Felt's own account and a more recent book by John D. O'Connor, sets out to present Felt as "an object of honour". Or so at least the writer-director has stated, describing him as "a man built to defend truth and justice [who] ultimately chooses to sacrifice all he knows and stands for in the name of a higher calling". His film, though, is more ambiguous. After three decades in the FBI, much of the time as J. Edgar Hoover's right-hand man, Felt expects to succeed as director when Hoover dies suddenly. Instead, Patrick Gray (Marton Csokas), an outsider with no previous Bureau experience, is parachuted in, seemingly at the behest of the White House. Felt, for all his discretion, clearly resents being passed over – as does, more vocally, his wife Audrey (Diane Lane) – and his subsequent actions can be read as his revenge on Gray and the Nixon administration.

Liam Neeson plays Felt as someone given to concealing his feelings. Still, he's visibly goaded by his former rival in the Bureau, Bill Sullivan (Tom Sizemore), who taunts him with being "competent, reliable and loyal". What's wrong with that, asks Felt. "Nothing – if you're a golden retriever," retorts Sullivan. It's one of the livelier lines in a script rather too loaded

Vocal hero: Liam Neeson

with exposition. This, taken in conjunction with an all but monochrome visual palette – lavish use of blue filter, dark grey offices, grey suits, frequent nocturnal scenes – makes for a conscientious but less than galvanising film. We're verbally reminded more than once that Felt has chosen a dangerous course of action but, despite Daniel Pemberton's brooding, ominous score, there's little sense of tension.

The peripheral storylines concerning Felt's family – the strained relationship with his neurotic, alcoholic wife, his worries about his vanished daughter Joan (Maika Monroe), who he fears may have joined the same violent counterculture group it's his job to investigate – are never given quite enough scope to make the impact they deserve. Much the same goes for most of the supporting roles, though Landesman has assembled an impressive cast. Eddie Marsan shows up for a blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo as an insidiously sympathetic CIA agent; one longs to see more. It's left to Neeson to carry the film, which he does with dignity but always holding us at arm's length. (Not the actor's fault; that's how the role is written.) So this is the Felt story – but perhaps not quite felt enough.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ridley Scott
Giannina Scott
Marc Butan
Anthony Katagas
Peter Landesman
Steve Richards
Jay Roach
Written by
Peter Landesman
Based on the books by Mark Felt, John O'Connor
Director of Photography
Adam Kimmel
Editor
Tariq Anwar
Production Designer
David Crank
Music by/Music Produced by
Daniel Pemberton
Sound Mixer
Jay Meagher
Costume Designer
Lorraine Z. Calvert

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Production Companies
Mandalay/Endurance Media Ventures and Torridon Films present in association with Riverstone Pictures a Madriver Pictures production
A Scott Free/Cara Films production
A film by Peter Landesman
Produced by Butler Pictures Limited
Executive Producers
Yale Badik
Des Carey
Colin Wilson
Peter Guber
Jeffrey Vinik
Nik Bower
Deepak Nayar
Michael Schaefer

Cast

Liam Neeson
Mark Felt
Diane Lane
Audrey Felt
Marton Csokas
L. Patrick Gray
Ike Barinholtz
Angelo Lano
Tony Goldwyn
Ed Miller
Bruce Greenwood
Sandy Smith
Michael C. Hall
John Dean
Brian D'Arcy James
Robert Kunkel
Josh Lucas
Charlie Bates
Eddie Marsan
agency man
Wendi McLendon-Covey
Carol Tschudy
Maika Monroe
Joan Felt
Tom Sizemore
Bill Sullivan
Kate Walsh
Pat Miller
Noah Wyle
Stan Pottinger
Julian Morris
Bob Woodward

In Colour [2.00:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Releasing

Washington DC, 1972. Mark Felt, associate director of the FBI and right-hand man to J. Edgar Hoover, is summoned by President Nixon's chief counsel John Dean to ask if Hoover might be persuaded to retire. Felt replies noncommittally but reminds Dean and his sidekicks, John Mitchell, the attorney general, and John Ehrlichman, that Hoover holds files on everyone in the administration. A few weeks later, Hoover dies. Felt orders the secret files destroyed. He expects to take over as director, but instead a White House-sponsored outsider, L. Patrick Gray, is appointed, to Felt's chagrin and that of his unstable wife Audrey. Soon afterwards, the Watergate affair erupts: men caught burgling the Democratic HQ prove to have links to the Committee to Re-elect the President. Under pressure from Mitchell, Gray tells Felt to wrap up his investigation into Watergate in 48 hours. Felt cuts Gray out of the loop, continues to investigate and leaks his findings to 'Time' magazine and the 'Washington Post'. The Bureau is also tracking down members of the violent counterculture organisation, the Weather Underground; Felt fears that his own daughter Joan may have joined the group. With the presidential election imminent, Felt meets with Bob Woodward of the 'Post', hinting that Nixon himself may be implicated.

In November, Nixon is re-elected with a landslide. But the story is up and running, and he resigns two years later. Gray is not confirmed as FBI director. Felt resigns after 31 years with the Bureau. In 1980, on trial for using illegal tactics against the Weather Underground, he hints that he may have been Woodward's 'Deep Throat'. He finally confesses to it in 2005.

Mary Magdalene

United Kingdom/Australia/USA 2018
Director: Garth Davis
Certificate 12A 119m 51s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Mary from Magdala is a woman carrying a lot of historical baggage. Conventional readings of the Gospels, for instance, suggest that Christ's acceptance of this prostitute exemplifies his boundless compassion. Research established long ago that she wasn't a working girl after all, but the sexual association still stuck, not least with Nikos Kazantzakis, who posited a life for her as Christ's wife in his literary reimagining *The Last Temptation of Christ*, controversially brought to the screen by Scorsese in 1988. Now here's another revisionist take, from an original screenplay by Helen Edmundson and Philippa Goslett, looking to reposition Mary as a woman who understands Jesus better than the other disciples do – she's the one who really gets him. As such, it's a declaration that belief sees none of the gender boundaries or hierarchies established by social convention, while it also seeks to insert a significant female player into the otherwise male-dominated roster of the Christian Apostles.

Thematically, this is a fresh contribution to the ongoing frictions between feminism and the traditions of Christian lore, but unfortunately Garth Davis's film rather struggles to assert itself as a viable drama when working with a narrative trajectory long established by the New Testament. Early on, there's a modicum of interest, since Rooney Mara's Mary is driven by inner urgings so volatile that her family (keen to get her married off and settled down) even arranges an exorcism in the hope that her demons can be tamed. It's Joaquin Phoenix's Jesus, a maverick preacher then doing the rounds, who creates a key turning point by sensing that Mary is driven by her strong faith to go out into the world. Once we've got to the realisation that they're kindred spirits, however, Mary's role becomes one of an invested observer unable to affect the outcome of Christ's foretold destiny, as we then click past the familiar landmarks in the Gospel story. Mara brings her usual intense focus to the role, and beardy Phoenix makes real Christ's very human anxieties about the fate in store for him, but strong performances aren't enough to compensate for a certain lack of conflict and character development.

That said, Davis has done an expert job of visualising the Gospel tale on various Mediterranean locations, finding a balance between historical veracity and biblical imagery familiar from centuries of art history. With cameraman Greig Fraser effectively adopting a constrained palette of sundry

Something about Mary: Phoenix, Mara

stony greys, the most obvious cinematic antecedent is Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (1964); but where that cinematic landmark achieved its depth of feeling by approaching its material with the freshness of discovery, here the filmmakers are presenting a sort of self-conscious addendum to existing understanding, so it's hard to achieve the same potency. Not for want of trying, though, and the underlying good intentions shine through, as indeed does much decorative skill in the making. A strong valedictory score by the late Jóhann Jóhannsson, working with collaborator Hildur Guðnadóttir, delivers keening strings to underline the film's devotional sincerity without getting too hectoring or saccharine about it.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Iain Canning
Emile Sherman
Liz Watts
Written by
Helen Edmundson
Philippa Goslett
Director of Photography
Greig Fraser
Edited by
Alexandre de Franceschi
Melanie Ann Oliver
Production Designer
Fiona Crombie
Music
Hildur Gudnadóttir
Jóhann Jóhannsson
Sound Designer
Robert Mackenzie
Costume Designer
Jacqueline Durran

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Production Companies
A film by Garth Davis
Focus Features presents in association with Film4 and FilmNation a See-Saw Films and Porchlight Films production
Post-produced with the assistance of Film Victoria
Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance
Developed in association with Film4
Executive Producer
Rose Garnett

Cast
Rooney Mara
Mary Magdalene
Joaquin Phoenix
Jesus
Chiwetel Ejiofor
Peter
Tahar Rahim
Judas
Ariane Labed
Rachel
Denis Ménochet
Daniel
Lubna Azabal
Susannah
Tchéky Karyo
Elisha
Charles Babalola
Andrew
Tawfeek Barhom
James
Ryan Corr
Joseph
Uri Gavriel
Phillip
Shira Haas
Leah
Tsahi Halevi
Ephraim
Michael Moshonov
Matthew
David Schofield
Thomas
Irit Sheleg
Mother Mary
Jules Sitruk
Aaron
Zohar Strauss
John
Lior Raz
Magdala community leader
Hadas Yaron
Sarah
Roy Assaf
temple priest

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Magdala, on the Sea of Galilee, 33 CE. Mary is a misfit daughter whose family is seeking to marry her off, though she is resistant. A new preacher, Jesus, has been attracting attention, and while the people long for a messiah to lead the nation out of Roman domination, the authorities remain vigilant against such sedition. Hoping to amend her behaviour, Mary's family arranges an ineffectual exorcism, but when Jesus later talks to her, he recognises deep faith within her and she joins his band of disciples. Mary develops a close understanding with Jesus, who is burdened by the sacrifice he already knows the Heavenly Father will ask of him. After Jesus's miraculous healing powers gain him a following, he and his disciples enter Jerusalem, where he confronts the moneylenders in the temple. Peter, the most forceful disciple, senses that a new kingdom is imminent. After they all take supper together, Jesus is captured by the Romans; he has been betrayed by Judas, who hopes to facilitate a final confrontation with the regime. Mary is knocked out by a soldier, and comes round later as Jesus bears his cross through the streets. Judas hangs himself. Jesus dies and appears to Mary after his death with a message that the kingdom is within us all. When the disciples prove too numbed by grief to hear it from her, Mary decides to spread the word among her fellow women.

Maze Runner The Death Cure

Director: Wes Ball
Certificate 12A 141m 35s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

There is something quintessentially Obama-era about the YA franchises, with their casts of post-racial, post-sexual youths agonising over ethical red lines and the legitimacy of their own power, amid a post-apocalyptic rubble of knocked-about skyscrapers and returned-to-nature freeways. This third instalment in the *Maze Runner* series is a late arrival, production having been suspended after star Dylan O'Brien was injured during filming. In the interim, the *Divergent* series has petered out, while the *5th Wave* trilogy has caused barely a ripple; those teens who caught the first *Maze Runner* film in 2014 may not be around for *The Death Cure* four years on. It emerges into a changed world then, but the YA mood of extreme pessimism hasn't dated all that badly.

O'Brien plays Thomas, one of the small band of 'Immunes' – unaffected by the virus that has turned much of the world's population into zombies – who have escaped from the titular maze and who begin *Death Cure* trying to rescue a group of fellow Immunes from the grown-ups. The grown-ups, specifically WCKD (World in Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department), want to do tests on the Immunes to develop an antidote, which they will then use for their own nefarious political ends. But whereas for most Immunes human experimentation is a no-no, their estranged friend Teresa (Kaya Scodelario) has joined the dark side – with the best of intentions.

The opening rescue sequence, involving car, train and plane, is very well mounted, and only slightly let down by the franchise's inherent *Bugsy Malone* quality. Later on, when Thomas and co infiltrate WCKD's citadel in order to liberate their friend Minho (Ki Hong Lee), *Maze Runner*'s mid-budget use of real corporate architecture is an asset, not a flaw; here, the sense of being alone in a chilly, desolate, heavily policed city, its adult denizens a crowd of masked semi-automata, is an effective encapsulation of a certain adolescent

Against wall odds: O'Brien, Brodie-Sangster

Weltanschauung. Teresa is in this respect the film's protagonist, having gone over to the adult world without wholly giving in to its values.

Among the others, there is little room for doubt. One of the many things *Maze Runner* has in common with the *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* series, not to mention *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, is an insistence on its heroes being not so much admirable, or even good, but blessed. During the course of *Death Cure*, Teresa discovers that Thomas – who is personally without distinction in O'Brien's rendering, and outshone by fellow Immune Brenda (Rosa Salazar) as far as heroism goes – is not only Immune but actually divine. His blood itself is the antidote – indeed, Brenda would be dead were she not frequently in his presence.

Teresa has to die – the city is in flames, torn down by the zombified 'Cranks' – and the film ends with Thomas and the other Immunes safe on their own island paradise. The last shot hints that Thomas may be considering the possibility of returning to the non-Immune world to share his life-giving essence; but whether he will or won't we may never know.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ellen Goldsmith-Vein
Wyck Godfrey
Marty Bowen
Joe Hartwick Jr
Wes Ball
Lee Stollman
Screenplay
T.S. Nowlin
Based on the novel by James Dashner
Director of Photography
Gyula Pados
Film Editors
Dan Zimmerman
Paul Harb
Production Designer
Daniel T. Dorrance
Music
John Paesano
Production Sound Mixer
Anselmi Davide
Costume Designer
Sanja Milkovic Hays
Stunt Co-ordinator
Glenn Suter
Fight Coordinator
Yasca Sinigaglia

Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents a Gotham Group/Temple Hill/Oddball Entertainment production
A Wes Ball film
Executive Producers
T.S. Nowlin
Lindsay Williams
Edward Gamarra
Lorenzo di Bonaventura
Daniel M. Stillman

Cast
Dylan O'Brien
Thomas
Kaya Scodelario
Teresa
Thomas Brodie-Sangster
Newt
Nathalie Emmanuel
Harriet
Giancarlo Esposito
Jorge
Aidan Gillen
Janson
Walton Goggins
Lawrence
Ki Hong Lee
Minho
Barry Pepper
Vince
Will Poulter
Gally
Patricia Clarkson
Dr Ava Paige
Dexter Darden
Frypan
Jacob Lofland
Aris
Katherine McNamara
Sonya
Rosa Salazar
Brenda

Dolby Atmos/Auro 11.1
In Colour
[2.35:1]
IMAX prints:
[1.78:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

In the post-apocalyptic wilderness, the Immunes, led by Thomas, stage a raid on a prison train operated by WCKD (World in Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department); they rescue a group of captives, but fail to retrieve their friend Minho. Back at base, Vince, leader of the Right Arm resistance, tells Thomas that he will not support another hazardous mission – a boat is ready, and it is time for them to leave for an island beyond WCKD's reach. Thomas and colleagues Newt and Frypan drive to the city where WCKD is headquartered, and are almost killed by virus-infected 'Cranks', before allies Brenda and Jorge arrive to help them.

The shantytown on the edge of the city is on the brink of a Crank uprising, and the raiding party is abducted by a group of revolutionaries that includes Gally, an old foe. The two groups bury their differences and join forces to get into the city. In order to access the WCKD compound, Thomas must persuade Teresa, his ex-girlfriend, to help; she is now employed by WCKD as a scientist, working to find an antidote to the virus. After Minho attacks her and another test subject dies, Teresa decides to join her old friends. However, they are soon detected, and though Brenda escapes with most of the test subjects, Teresa is killed and Newt succumbs to the virus. The city is destroyed by a Crank army.

Vince arrives in time to save Thomas. On the Immunes' island, Thomas reflects on Teresa's discovery that his blood may provide the antidote to the virus.

My Generation

United Kingdom/USA 2017
Director: David Batty
Certificate 12A 85m 36s

Reviewed by Mark Sinker

The plausible cockney rogue that Michael Caine has been playing for 50-odd years is very practised now, easy on the ear and excellent company. Born in 1933 in Rotherhithe, his father a Billingsgate porter, his mother a charlady, the actor seems perfect for the task here: a working-class kid whose big break (*The Ipcress File*, 1965) coincided with London becoming the swinging centre of cultural change. Combined with (mostly offscreen) interviews from the other half-dozen luminaries featured in this documentary, his anecdotes very effectively deliver the viewpoint then and now of a small number of people (just 300, Marianne Faithfull suggests) during a briefish period of time. Soundtracked by the best-known British pop of the era (The Beatles, The Kinks, The Who, Cream), the furious montage that backdrops these stories is engaging and often witty, with well-chosen clips from films, TV interviews and news footage from the decade or so at issue.

The film is divided into three acts, starting with 'Something in the Air', which argues that for the first time in history, in a London that was an amazingly cheap place to live, in the shadow of the bomb, working-class youth was recklessly setting the pace and the scene, in sound, in fashion, in manner and morals and even in politics. No longer destined for the servant classes, these young people mocked the idea of the rich as their 'betters' and all the outdated hierarchies being foisted on them. 'I Feel Free' centres on the new sexual freedoms of young women, from miniskirts to the pill, and the heady excitement of this for all concerned ("David Bailey makes love daily," was apparently a much quoted joke). 'All Was Not As It Seemed' deals with the aftermath: not just drug busts and comedown, but a stubbornly reactionary establishment restoring its authority, alongside the recognition that the Vietnam War could not just be wished away. And there the film ends, really a little too tidily.

Sixteen years older than Twiggy, at the earliest end of the relevant generational tranche, Caine neither turned on nor dropped out. More than most he trusted old-school craft and graft, and – as a consequence? – is monstrously convincing here as a hired pro delivering someone else's script. The writers are Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, best known for their invaluable hilarious-melancholy account of what it is to realise that sexual and social ferment is passing you by (*The Likely Lads* and *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads?*). Watching Caine today being chauffeured across modern developer-rotted London in his gorgeously tailored coat, it's hard not to think of the many left behind, then and now. The city is so changed in 2018, forbiddingly expensive for the young, and the institutions that made the 1960s revolt possible – not just housing, but health and education for all – have been under sustained assault for years. Perhaps overall conditions haven't yet fallen all the way back to the 1930s, but the possibilities open to upcoming sink-estate Mary Quants and Michael Caines can certainly seem as limited as they were in the 1950s, and class hierarchy has entirely reasserted itself.

The self-made breakthrough was short-lived, and the rhetoric of the few that went on to such adamantine global success is too often marshalled in public discourse to dismiss the many who were unable to move so fast or so far. Nor is this the only twist that's left unexamined. While the trauma of Vietnam (which barely touched the UK) is dwelt on, no mention is made of what the preceding generation had been through. No one quite grasps how the suffocating dullness that the golden 60s youth pushed against was an intimate effect of the very institutions that enabled it to aspire to be golden. All we hear of the end of empire is an Alf Garnett rant and Harold Macmillan talking about "the winds of change". The force and attraction of the new pop music came from its black sources, but we encounter almost no black faces, in foreground or even background. With the exception of a young Tony Benn denouncing pirate radio in his centrist technocrat phase, critics of the 60s wave are the crustiest shire-Tory stereotypes: Sir Gerald Nabarro at length, twice, neither time identified, calling for "discipline", is merely absurd, and far too easy to shrug off.

And all the while the argot of class disrespect was being picked up by the nascent Murdoch press. At a darker, not unrelated level, the predators later targeted by Operation Yewtree were discovering new spaces to prowl and deliver harm. Sexual silence had once been their ally; sexual licence was very quickly as poisoned. Look at some of the younger faces in the footage here: what do you see except perilous openness and vulnerability?

With fascinating detail appended around the margins, the case for the defence is boldly made by a handful of those who were there. But as too often happens with clip-blizzard documentaries, a lot of the hints and clues are simply not followed up (the film even uses a Woody Allen moment for its present-day frisson, and then just ducks away from the implications). Too much time is spent on extremely well-known material – The Beatles! The Stones! – and this allows the filmmakers to choose not to notice all that five full decades have added to the case for the prosecution. Yes, Caine is the perfect affable host – but a narrative centred around Twiggy's and Quant's and Faithfull's stories, their epiphanies and conflicts and tribulations, and the very bumpy evolution of 70s feminism out of 60s fashion and free love, would have been a little less sleight-of-hand and complacently overfamiliar.

Billion-dollar Caine: Michael Caine

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Simon Fuller
Michael Caine
Dick Clement
Ian La Frenais
Fodhla Cronin O'Reilly
Writers
Dick Clement
Ian La Frenais
Director of Photography
Ben Hodgson
Film Editor
Ben Hilton
Production Designer
Aurelie Taillefer
Re-recording Mixer
John Rogerson

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Production Companies
XIX Entertainment presents in association with IM Global a Raymi Films production in association with Ingenious Media
Made with the support of XIX Entertainment, Ingenious Media
A Raymi Films production
Executive Producer
James Clayton
Film Extracts
We Love You (1967)
Les Teenagers (1967)
Monterey Pop (1968)

With
presented by
Michael Caine
key contributors
David Bailey
Michael Caine
Joan Collins
Roger Daltrey
Donovan
Dudley Edwards
Marianne Faithfull
Barbara Hulanicki
Lulu
Paul McCartney
Terry O'Neill
David Puttnam
Mary Quant
Mim Scala
Sandie Shaw
Penelope Tree
Twiggy

In Colour

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Documentary. Over a montage of music and clips from the films and television of the time, Michael Caine and others – including David Bailey, Roger Daltrey, Marianne Faithfull, Paul McCartney, Mary Quant and Twiggy – celebrate Swinging London as they experienced it.

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My Golden Days

France 2015
Director: Arnaud Desplechin

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

A certain strain of French art cinema exults in celebrating its antecedents, so much so that the national industry is constantly producing films that seem virtually archetypal. Here's another one, of which you might say to a novice viewer, "*This*, basically, is French cinema." It's the work of one of the most committed and most elegant of filmmakers borrowing from, and indeed transforming, the past. Arnaud Desplechin's *My Golden Days* (belatedly released in the UK, nearly a year after its follow-up, *Ismael's Ghosts*, premiered at Cannes) could easily be taken as a quintessential example of *jeune cinéma français* – at least in so far as it comes from a member of one of the earlier generations once identified by that label, himself now in his sixth decade.

The film – its full French title translates as 'Three Memories of My Youth' – is effectively a prequel and a continuation of Desplechin's *My Sex Life... Or How I Got into an Argument* (1996). It depicts three remembered episodes in the early life of that film's protagonist, Paul Dédalus, again played as an adult by Mathieu Amalric. That the new film's subtitle translates as 'Our Arcadias' is ironic in that only one of its chapters, dealing with young love, depicts anything like a lost idyll – and at that an idyll underwritten by heartbreak and, to use a word much heard here, '*angoisse*' – anguish. The other two depict, respectively, a child's painful apprehension of adult sorrow and madness, and the complexities of a dark period in world politics, remembered by the older Paul as he is implacably quizzed by a government official (the usually affable André Dussollier, showing that he can also excel at the smilingly sinister).

The film's first two episodes pass quickly and seem barely related to the third, 'Esther', which constitutes the main body of the film. Their inclusion is a reminder of Desplechin's characteristic tendency to expansiveness. His films often resemble modernist novels in the way they absorb details that don't always fit the basic narrative jigsaw. Examples of that digressiveness here include a scene in which the female partner of Paul's great-aunt reminisces about her long-lost husband, and a rapidly abandoned thread involving Paul's religiously preoccupied younger brother and his fantasy of robbing a bank. And while we largely see events through Paul's eyes – he also intermittently serves as voiceover narrator – there are scenes that he himself never witnesses.

At the heart of the film is Paul's teenage love Esther. In the third chapter, set in Paul's (and the director's) hometown of Roubaix, she is a source both of inspiration and of agony for him, and the magnet that keeps pulling him home. Esther's power lies in formidable sexual confidence – reputed to be highly promiscuous, she sleeps with Paul's best friend and his cousin, among others – but her magnetism for the viewer lies in the charisma of newcomer Lou Roy-Lecollinet and also in the way that Irina Lubtchansky's camera catches her glowing, puppyish features, suggestive of an Auguste Renoir model posing as a 1980s tough girl. Framing and editing mimic the adoration in Paul's gaze, as when Esther enters a party in slow motion, wreathed in a soundtrack halo of orchestral strings, or in the scenes where the young couple exchange letters and she casts knowing looks at the camera, directly or via a mirror.

Past tango in Paris: Quentin Dolmaire, Lou Roy-Lecollinet

But Esther comes across uncomfortably as a time-honoured breed of *jeune fille fatale*: while Paul is characterised by his intellectual pursuits, she is often shown admiring him ("You're divine concerning discourse, O Paul Dédalus," she says, reading ancient Greek in bed with him) or is defined by her sexual power and inconstancy, and by the melancholy, implicitly verging on madness, that her own nature seems to cause her. The French cinematic template for such an agonised, mercurial muse is Jeanne Moreau's Catherine in *Jules et Jim* (1962), and it's Truffaut's early style and mode of amorous nostalgia that the film systematically, knowingly evokes. The debt to Truffaut emerges in the abrupt, often seemingly free-associative editing style; in camera tricks such as Desplechin's favoured use of the iris; in voiceovers and epistolary passages; even in the echoing of Georges Delerue's music, referenced in Grégoire Hetzel's score, together with a snatch from *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960).

These echoes notwithstanding, *My Golden Days* feels highly distinctive, a very personal variant on a treasured catalogue of tropes. The film elegiacally depicts the late 1980s as a period of change and endings (watching the Berlin Wall fall on TV, the solipsistic Paul grieves that he's seeing the end of his childhood), and takes that decade as a frame for the lamenting of lost youth and lost love that has been a French literary trope at least since Flaubert and Proust and down through generations of their cinematic and literary inheritors. The young, hitherto unknown cast are superbly directed and very affecting, sometimes especially so when there's a certain natural awkwardness in their performances, notably Quentin Dolmaire's as Paul.

Desplechin may be pushing 60, but *My Golden Days* helps to pinpoint just what makes his best work so touching. This film seems not so much like adolescence remembered by an adult, but – thanks to the intellectually effusive self-consciousness of its young hero – more like an adolescent's imagining of adulthood and the feelings that accompany it. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Pascal Caucheteux
Written by
Arnaud Desplechin
Julier Peyr
Director of Photography
Irina Lubtchansky
Editor
Laurence Briaud
Production Designer
Toma Baqueni
Original Music
Grégoire Hetzel
Sound
Nicolas Cantin
Sylvain Malbrant
Stéphane Thiebaut
Costume Designer
Nathalie Raoul

©Why Not Productions, France 2 Cinéma

Production Companies
Why Not Productions
present a Why Not Productions, France 2 Cinéma, Le Pacte, Wild Bunch co-production
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions, Centre National du Cinéma et de la Image Animée and of Pictanovo with the support of la Région Nord-Pas de Calais and in partnership with the CNC
With the support of Soficinéma 11, Cinéimage 9, l'Angoa, and la Procirep
A film by Arnaud Desplechin
A Why Not Productions, France 2 Cinéma co-production
Executive Producer
Oury Milshtein
Film Extracts
Fort Apache (1948)

Cast

Quentin Dolmaire
Paul Dédalus
Lou Roy-Lecollinet
Esther
Mathieu Amalric
Paul Dédalus as an adult
Dinara Drukarova
Irina
Cécile Garcia Fogel
Jeanne Dédalus, mother
Françoise Lebrun
Rose
Irina Vavilova
Mme Sidorov
Olivier Rabourdin
Abel Dédalus, father
Elyot Milshtein
Marc Zylberberg
Pierre Andrau
Kovalki
André Dussolier
Claverie

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse

Tajikistan, present day. Returning to France to take up a ministry post in Paris, anthropologist Paul Dédalus recalls three periods in his past.

'Childhood': 11-year-old Paul contends with his mother's madness and suicide.

'Russia': Paul is questioned by French authorities as he returns home from Tajikistan. He explains why there are records of another 'Paul Dédalus': as a teenager, while on a school trip to the USSR, he gave his passport to a young Jewish man who was planning to emigrate to Israel.

'Esther': in the 1980s, 19-year-old Paul is studying anthropology in Paris. He returns to his hometown of Roubaix and begins a troubled romance with 16-year-old Esther, which lasts until she leaves him for his friend Kovalki.

Years later in Paris, Paul confronts Kovalki about the episode.

Padmaavat

Director: Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Certificate 12A 163m 37s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Sometimes the circumstances surrounding the release of a film are more dramatic than the film itself. From the time it began shooting, *Padmaavat* faced severe opposition in India from fringe groups belonging to the Hindu Rajput community, on the grounds that it distorted history and besmirched the honour of Rajputs. The sets were repeatedly vandalised and director Sanjay Leela Bhansali and lead actress Deepika Padukone received death threats when rumours emerged that the film had a romantic dream sequence featuring the Muslim ruler Alauddin Khilji and Hindu queen Padmavati. None of the protesters had seen the film. After a two-month delay the film eventually released with a few cuts ordered by India's censor board and went on to be a box-office smash.

Bhansali is one of the great visual stylists of Indian cinema and aided by cinematographer Sudeep Chatterjee's stunning imagery and the sumptuous production design and costumes, the film is indeed dazzling to look at. On paper, the film has everything going for it – a beautiful queen, her handsome husband, and a megalomaniac invader who desires the queen sight unseen, at the instigation of a crafty priest, and is prepared to go to any lengths to achieve his goal, including a long siege that puts his army under great duress. However, unlike Bhansali's previous lavish period epic *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), where all the leading players were fully fleshed out, *Padmaavat* suffers from its one-note characterisations. Ratan Singh (Shahid Kapoor), the king of Mewar, has little to do besides delivering stiff homilies about Rajput honour. His second wife, the fiery and beautiful Singhal princess Padmavati (Padukone), becomes curiously subdued after she becomes a queen. Alauddin Khilji, the ruler who covets Padmavati, is introduced as a barbarian, and Ranveer Singh plays him with scenery-chewing relish but without adding any depth to the character. It is the smaller roles that are imbued with some complexity: Jim Sarbh as Alauddin's devoted slave Malik Kafur and Aayam Mehta as Raghav Chetan, the formerly honourable royal priest whose baser instincts are revealed when he drinks in Padmavati's beauty, are both scene stealers.

Despite these brief sparks, however, *Padmaavat* remains dull and bereft of the emotional heft that it sorely requires. It is a gorgeous but ultimately empty spectacle, a beauty that is skin deep.

Dancing queen: Deepika Padukone

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Sudhanshu Vats
Ajit Andhare
Screenplay
Prakash R. Kapadia
Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Dialogue
Prakash R. Kapadia
Director of Photography
Sudeep Chatterjee
Editor
Rajesh G. Pandey
Production Design
Subrata Chakraborty
Amit Ray
Music
Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Lyrics
A.M. Turaz
Siddharth-Garima
Background Score
Sanchit Balhara
Sound Design
Bishwadeep Dipak Chatterjee
Costume Designer
Harpreet Rimple
Maxima Basu
Chandrakant & Ajay
Choreographers
Ganesh Acharya
Shampa Gopikishna
Visual Effects
Prime Focus Ltd
Action Director
Sham Kaushal

Production Companies
Viacom 18 Motion Pictures and Bhansali Productions present a Sanjay Leela Bhansali film
Executive Producers
Arvinder Gill
Pratik Rawal

Cast
Deepika Padukone
Padmavati
Shahid Kapoor
Maharawal Ratan Singh
Ranveer Singh
Sultan Alauddin Khilji
Aditi Rao Hydari
Mehrunissa
Jim Sarbh
Malik Kafur
Raza Murad
Jalaluddin Khilji
Anupriya Goenka
Nagmati
Sharhaan Singh
Vijaydaan Singh
Aayam Mehta
Rajguru
Ujjwal Chopra
Gora Singh
Veena Mehta
Suraj Baisa
Ashwin Dhar
Ulugh Khan
Vibhav Roy
Itaat Khan

In Colour [2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Afghanistan, the 13th century. Sultan Jalaluddin Khilji plans to usurp the sultanate of Delhi in India. His nephew Alauddin asks for and is granted the hand of Jalaluddin's daughter Mehrunnisa. Maharawal Ratan Singh, the king of Mewar, travels to Singhal (Sri Lanka) to get pearls for his wife Nagmati. Fiery Singhal princess Padmavati wounds him in a hunting accident. They fall in love, marry and go to Chittor, the capital of Mewar. The Mewar royal priest Raghav Chetan is struck by Padmavati's beauty. He spies on the royal couple, is found out and banished. Meanwhile, Jalaluddin seizes the Delhi throne and proclaims himself emperor of India. Alauddin repels Mongol invaders on his uncle's behalf; Jalaluddin rewards him with a loyal slave, Malik Kafur, who falls in love with Alauddin. Alauddin has Jalaluddin assassinated and becomes the new ruler. Raghav Chetan arrives at his court and describes Padmavati's great beauty to him. Alauddin lays siege to Chittor for months and finally calls for a truce and an invitation to the fort. He insults Ratan Singh by asking to see his wife. Ratan Singh spares his life and Padmavati allows Alauddin to catch a glimpse of her. Through subterfuge, Alauddin captures Ratan Singh and takes him to Delhi. Padmavati agrees to go to Delhi on condition that Alauddin delivers the head of Raghav Chetan and that she can see her husband before meeting Alauddin. Raghav Chetan's head is duly delivered and Padmavati travels to Delhi with 800 soldiers disguised as maids. With Mehrunnisa's help, Padmavati frees Ratan Singh and takes him back to Chittor. Alauddin and his army attack Chittor. Ratan Singh engages in single combat with Alauddin and has the advantage over him, before Malik Kafur disobeys the rules of battle and kills Ratan Singh. Padmavati and all the females of Chittor, including children, commit 'Jauhar' (mass immolation) rather than submit to the invaders.

Pad Man

Director: R. Balki
Certificate 12A 139m 54s

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

With 'period poverty' being debated in parliament, the release of a film about social entrepreneur Arunachalam Muruganantham feels timely. His machines, which make sanitary pads at a fraction of the cost of commercially produced varieties, have improved the lives of many women in rural India. As well as offering an alternative to cheap but dangerously unhygienic solutions such as rags and ashes, his invention empowers women by providing them with work, producing and selling the pads in their communities. Muruganantham has already been the subject of a 2013 documentary, *Menstrual Man*, but in 2016, feminist writer, producer and actress Twinkle Khanna fictionalised him in a short story. Now she has expanded her hygiene hero to *Pad Man*, a feature-length Bollywood musical with gleaming cinematography, a star cast and an uplifting narrative that redefines the phrase 'rags to riches'.

Akshay Kumar stars as serious, single-minded Lakshmi, the husband who is so horrified by his wife's monthly use of a dirty cloth that he resolves to invent a healthier alternative. Radhika Apte is particularly strong as his young but old-fashioned wife Gayatri, so mortified by her husband's insistence on breaking the taboos surrounding menstruation that she tells him: "I would rather die of an illness than live in shame." It's not just Gayatri; Lakshmi's sisters and the female students at the local medical college also shrink from trying his invention. One of *Pad Man*'s strengths is its portrayal of the stigma around periods in this rural community, a shame that the audience is invited to condemn but also understand. One day, the local women perform a song and dance to celebrate a girl's menarche, the scene gorgeously choreographed and saturated with colour and light. Later that night, Lakshmi sneaks up to the girl's balcony to offer her one of his prototype pads. Even while acknowledging the euphemism in the former sequence and the good intentions in the latter, the jarring clumsiness of Lakshmi's approach is obvious.

Throughout *Pad Man*, in fact, disarming frankness is balanced with a certain, perhaps inevitable, coyness. In one jaw-dropping scene, Lakshmi road tests his own invention with a bladder of blood lashed to his belt. The resulting

Dry freedom: Akshay Kumar, Radhika Apte

leak, seeping through his trousers, is the closest thing we'll see to menses in the movie, which is consistently vague on the facts of menstruation. It takes an urban woman, Delhi-based business student Pari (sweetly played by Sonam Kapoor), to give Lakshmi's venture the boost it needs; not least because the stigma means that women will only talk to other women about periods.

Unfortunately, the second half of the film, charting Lakshmi's rise, is less compelling than the challenges of the first half. By the end of *Pad Man*, Lakshmi has addressed the UN in charming broken English and has been compared to a superhero by none other than Amitabh Bachchan (cameoing as himself at an awards ceremony) and carried in triumph through his home village. His acclaim is well deserved, but it invites the question: why aren't the stories of the women who used this machine to improve their lives afforded the same lustrous treatment?

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Twinkle Khanna
Writer
R. Balki
Co-writer
Swanand Kirkire
Concept
Twinkle Khanna
Cinematographer
P.C. Sreeram
Editor
Chandan Arora
Production Designer
Rupin Suchak
Music Composer
Amit Trivedi
Lyricist
Kausar Munir
Sound Desinger
Debasish Mishra
Costume Designer
Theia Tekchandaney
Action Director
Aamar Shetty
Choreographer
Brinda

Production Companies
Mrs Funnybones Movies, SPE Films India, KriArj Entertainment present a Hope Productions film
Producers: SPE Films India, KriArj Entertainment, Cape of Good Films, Hope Productions

Cast
Akshay Kumar
Lakshmikant Chauhan, 'Lakshmi'
Sonam Kapoor
Pari
Radhika Apte
Gayatri
Jyoti Subhash
Lakshmi's mother
Urmila Mahanta
Savitri
Suneel Singha
Pari's father
Sanjay Singh
Gayatri's 1st brother
Rakesh Chaturvedi Om
professor
Mrinmayee Godbole
Lakshmi's 1st sister
Mridul Satam
Tinku
Parul Chouhan
Lakshmi's 2nd sister
Saumya Vyas
Lakshmi's 3rd sister
Riva Bubber
Tinku's mum
Wahib Kapadia
professor's kid

[*uncredited*]
Amitabh Bachchan
himself

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, India, 2001. Lakshmi is horrified to discover that his wife Gayatri uses a dirty cloth when she has her period. He tries to buy her sanitary pads but she points out that they are prohibitively expensive. He undertakes to make her a cheaper pad, but when she finally tries it, it leaks. Lakshmi tests an improved version himself, but it also leaks, and he jumps into the river to wash his trousers, incurring the wrath of the village. Gayatri moves in with her brother, while Lakshmi goes away to make a better pad. At university, he learns more about the design and resolves to make a machine to make pads in bulk. Still no one will try his pad. One evening he meets Pari, a Delhi business student playing at a music festival. She tries his new pad and it works. Pari and her father encourage Lakshmi to enter an innovation contest. He wins and returns to Madhya Pradesh, where he uses his prize money to start making cheap pads, which Pari sells to local women. They hire more women to make and sell the pads, and then set up a scheme whereby women can obtain loans to buy one of Lakshmi's machines. Lakshmi is asked to speak at the UN. In New York, he and Pari kiss; he confesses his love for her, but she denies her feelings. Lakshmi receives a hero's welcome in Maheshwar, and is reunited with Gayatri.

Peter Rabbit

USA/Australia 2018
Director: Will Gluck
Certificate PG 94m 34s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

In 1936, Beatrix Potter refused Walt Disney's offer to put Peter Rabbit on screen with a self-deprecating nod to her famous illustrations: "To enlarge... will show up all the imperfections." Unlike the ubiquitous Winnie the Pooh, Peter Rabbit's only big-screen appearance has been in the decorous ballet *The Tales of Beatrix Potter* (1971). So traditionalists may choke on their bread and milk and blackberries at Peter reimagined as the furry, feuding rebel who leaves a trail of destruction in Will Gluck's crammed and relentlessly kinetic live-action/animated comedy.

Keen to establish its ironic edge, the opening has its motormouth hero bash aside a flock of homiletic singing birds, as bunny Flopsy's chatty narration assures us this isn't *that* kind of movie. Potter's gentle allegory about disobedience and children's socialisation has disappeared like dandelion fluff. As much gang as family, Peter's orphaned sisters and cousin Benjamin join him in a commando raid on Mr McGregor's garden. This rule-breaking prank is reworked as a showboating snatch-and-grab executed to dance music, *Alvin and the Chipmunks*-style, that handily kills off old McGregor.

Determined to crank up the thrill level, Gluck and co-writer Rob Lieber fashion the conflict that follows between Peter and co and fastidious young heir Thomas McGregor (Domhnall Gleeson) as the kind of violent, all-out war not seen since the *Home Alone* series. Strangling, electrocution, volleys of veg slamming into Thomas's crotch, dynamite tossed in the lettuces – the assaults pile up, to slightly numbing effect.

If the violence is cartoonish, the CGI rabbits and their woodland chums are astonishingly lifelike, right down to their lolloping runs and fur ruffling in the wind. There's a certain tension, however, between their impeccable animal modelling and their human-inflected behaviour – in group shots, you can't always make out who's talking. This is partly because of the squabbling one-note characterisation of Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-tail (a waste of Margot Robbie, Elizabeth Debicki and Daisy Ridley), who never get the deft demarcation of, say, *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009) – probably because James Corden's cocky, wisecracking Peter dominates every scene, with his hipper-than-*Hop* banter. By the halfway mark, Gluck seems more interested in the romance between Thomas and his artist neighbour Bea (Rose Byrne), Peter's human mother figure, than in his hero's quest. There's an awkward handbrake turn needed to transform Thomas from villain into romcom lead, which Gleeson manages gamely, adding inept swain to his slapstick routine.

It's a pity, since the film's best scenes are among the animals – a raucous house party of Potter creatures, for example, or the running gag of rabbits lip-reading human interactions wrongly. This kind of sweetness is swamped, however, by the film's urgent need to be edgy and knowing, occasionally tipping into bad taste. Mr McGregor's heart attack is mined for laughs, while Thomas is both electrocuted into unconsciousness and, in a queasy sequence, deliberately felled by a near-fatal blackberry allergy, averted only by his EpiPen. Roars of approval from the child audience don't compensate for the try-hard tip from daring into crassness. Both the *Paddington* and *Winnie the Pooh* film series managed to keep the charming essence of their central characters intact. But *Peter Rabbit*, waving its classic credentials as a come-on for scenes of comic carnage, wants to have its carrot cake and eat it.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Will Gluck
Zareh Nalbandian
Screen Story and Screenplay
Rob Lieber
Will Gluck
Based on the characters and tales of 'Peter Rabbit' by Beatrix Potter
Director of Photography
Peter Menzies Jr
Editors
Christian Gazal
Jonathan Tappin
Production Designer
Roger Ford

Music
Dominic Lewis
Sound Recordist
Ben Osmo
Costume Designer
Lizzy Gardiner
Animation Director
Rob Coleman
Animation and Visual Effects
Animal Logic
Visual Effects
Rising Sun Pictures
Cutting Edge
Cumulus Visual Effects
SlateVFX
Stunt Co-ordinator
Lawrence Woodward

©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. and 2.0 Entertainment Financing, LLC
Production Companies
Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Animation present in association with 2.0 Entertainment an Animal Logic Entertainment, Olive Bridge Entertainment production
A Will Gluck film
Executive Producers
Doug Belgrad
Jodi Hildebrand
Catherine Bishop
Susan Bolsover
Emma Topping
Rob Lieber
Jason Lust
Jonathan Hludzinski

Cast
Rose Byrne
Bea
Domhnall Gleeson
Mr Thomas McGregor
Sam Neill
old Mr McGregor
Marianne Jean Baptiste
general manager

Voice Cast
Rose Byrne
Jemima Puddle-Duck
Domhnall Gleeson
Mr Jeremy Fisher
Sam Neill
Tommy Brock
Daisy Ridley
Cotton-Tail
Elizabeth Debicki
Mopsy
Sia
Mrs Tiggy-Winkle
Colin Moody
Benjamin Bunny
Margot Robbie
Flopsy/The Narrator
James Corden
Peter Rabbit

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

The Lake District, England, present day. Old Mr McGregor dies of a heart attack while catching Peter Rabbit taking his garden vegetables. McGregor killed Peter's father long ago. His great-nephew Thomas inherits the house and garden, which Peter and his animal friends have wrecked. The rabbits foil Thomas's attempt to drown Benjamin Bunny. Thomas tries to keep out Peter and the other rabbits with an electric fence; they persecute him in return. Thomas falls in love with artist neighbour Bea, Peter's human friend. Peter is jealous of her interest in Thomas, who is electrocuted when the rabbits disable the fence. Thomas throws dynamite sticks into the rabbits' burrow. Thomas has a near-fatal allergic reaction to a blackberry during a violent garden battle with the rabbits. Peter gets the detonator and blows up the burrow, to incriminate Thomas. Bea's studio is destroyed. Thomas and Bea break up and Thomas returns to his job at Harrods in London. Peter and Benjamin Bunny follow him to Harrods and cause havoc. Peter apologises to Thomas for ruining everything. They make up, and dash back to the house before Bea can leave. Peter shows Bea that he detonated the burrow. An unpleasant couple have bought the house. Peter and the rabbits electrify the doorknobs and scare them off. Everyone is reconciled.

Proud Mary

USA 2018
Director: Babak Najafi
Certificate 15 88m 56s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The producers of hitwoman picture *Proud Mary* shelled out for some tunes: the title comes from the old Creedence standard, heard here performed by Tina Turner; the movie kicks off with The Temptations' 'Papa Was a Rollin' Stone' under the credits; and it's generously ladled throughout with helpings of background R&B. Curious then to report that the thing the movie acutely and fatally lacks is rhythm – maybe a little of that money should have been set aside for a better director than Babak Najafi.

The one word to describe Najafi's treatment of a script that must not have been much to begin with, judging from what wound up on screen, is 'perfunctory'. There's a rival gang of Russians because of course there's a rival gang of Russians. The runtime is an alluring 88 minutes, but it registers as something like twice that. Dialogue scenes are shot without making space for a single bit of interesting actorly business, going through the shot-reverse-shot motions as though according to a pre-set timer, with little regard to sculpting or creating cadence. When more than two people are together in a room, as in meeting scenes with Boston crime boss Danny Glover and his son and capo Billy Brown, we just knock indiscriminately between framings whose lone unifying feature is their total and abject absence of tension and dynamism, the bread and butter of this sort of picture. Incidentally, did you know that Glover was capable of giving a really bad, downright somnambulistic performance? I didn't either, until quite recently.

Glover is the criminal foster father who raised Taraji P. Henson's Mary from a foundling and taught her the art of assassination, and so he's reluctant to see her go when she adopts an orphan of her own, the adolescent Danny, played by Jahi Di'Allo Winston. Looking after the boy, Mary discovers her maternal instinct, though Henson and Winston never seem to discover even a modicum of chemistry during their heart-to-heart chats looking across Massachusetts Bay or handling clunkily jocular banter about hot dogs on strolls through Boston Common. The city has in recent years become the capital of crime thrillers, though the movie differs from most of its Boston-set precedents in having a largely African-American cast. This should not be taken to mean that it expresses the slightest interest in the facts of African-American life in Boston, Boston, organised crime or anything really, other than locating the shortest distance between clichés.

Hit and miss: Taraji P. Henson

The final shootout is a dour parade of killshots, like a less cogent *John Wick* (2014), though the US release poster, which has Henson sporting an Afro formed from the cast of characters and myriad action scenes, seems to promise a Blaxploitation homage. It caught my eye because it's a thoughtfully designed poster, cool font and all, a real rarity in these unimaginative, cut-corner days. As for the movie, it's distinguished only in containing not a single scene that you can't find somewhere else done better.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paul Schiff
Tai Duncan
Screenplay
John Stuart Newman
Christian Swegal
Steven Antin
Story
John Stuart Newman
Christian Swegal
Director of Photography
Dan Laustsen
Editor
Evan Schiff
Production Designer
Carl Sprague
Music
Fil Eisler
Production Sound Mixer
Kevin Parker
Costume Designer
Deborah Newhall

©Screen Gems, Inc.
Production Company
Screen Gems presents a Paul Schiff production
Executive Producers
Glenn S. Gainor

Cast
Taraji P. Henson
Mary Goodwin
Billy Brown
Tom Spencer
Jahi Di'Allo Winston
Danny
Neal McDonough
Walter
Margaret Avery
Mina
Xander Berkeley
Uncle
Rade Serbedzija
Luka
Erik LaRay Harvey
Reggie
Danny Glover
Benny Spencer

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Boston, present day. Mary Goodwin, a hitwoman in the employ of an organised crime syndicate, assassinates a bookie at his home, only to discover the victim's young son, now orphaned, in an adjacent room.

A year later, the boy, Danny, is working for 'Uncle', the abusive captain of a rival Russian syndicate. Mary finds Danny unconscious on the street after a run-in with Uncle and takes him under her wing, deciding to secure his freedom from Uncle while concealing the fact that she killed his father. When Uncle refuses, Mary kills him. She escapes the scene unidentified, but the murder sparks tension between the Russians and Mary's syndicate, which is headed by her mentor Benny and his son (and Mary's ex) Tom. At Benny's behest, Mary carries out an assassination meant to placate the Russians, but the Russians nevertheless target Benny's men in a drive-by shooting. Benny invites Mary, Danny and Tom to a birthday dinner at his home, where Tom guesses the boy's identity and threatens to reveal it to Benny, thus compromising Mary. Mary is wounded when she and Tom carry out a retaliatory hit on the Russians; Danny, seeing her hurt, decides to confront Benny and demand her release from his service. Benny tells Danny that Mary killed his father, but is then killed by an interrupting Mary. Mary and Danny mend ties. When Danny is kidnapped by Tom, Mary kills Tom and all remaining members of Benny's gang. She and Danny are free to start a new life.

Psycho Vertical

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Jen Randall

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"Bitterness, envy, hate... they're the greatest driving forces. Love is rubbish. Love doesn't get you far at all." This is characteristic of the startlingly bleak homilies offered up by British climber Andy Kirkpatrick in Jen Randall's documentary portrait. That her subject finds work as a motivational speaker would seem like a mordant joke, were it not for the fact that we see clips. In one, Kirkpatrick is talking about the way that mothers stroke children's hair to console them. "Does no fucking good, does it? It doesn't solve anything." In another, he shares his bitterness about having taken the photograph his wife used on the dating site where she met another man. Negative observations about women come frequently in a film that determinedly sets oppressive feminine domesticity against the male urge for 'freedom' – here defined as the liberty to absent oneself from family life to pursue other interests. In Kirkpatrick's case, that means regular long, risky, solitary climbing expeditions.

Speaking directly to camera – the film uses no other talking heads – Kirkpatrick shares how he idolised his father, whose restlessness prevented full participation in family life. "It wasn't maybe about another woman," Kirkpatrick vaguely asserts. "It was mainly about this freedom, to go into this place, really." The words 'maybe' and 'mainly' blur in his delivery, a tic that illuminates his unwillingness to accept the possibility that his father's issue might have been workaday faithlessness rather than a heroic degree of masculine autonomy. "I don't think he ever wanted kids," Kirkpatrick observes. Well, at least something can be learned from that – like that if you're obsessed with your own 'freedom', and don't really want kids, it would be wise to avoid getting married and having kids. Right? Well, no, because Andy meets Mandy, who makes it clear she wants children, and marries her. Mandy's desire to be a mother, he says with a cruel laugh, "always seemed like nothing to do with me. It was like someone saying they were going to get a horse. If she wanted that, she could have it." So Kirkpatrick participates in the making of two humans, while his priority remains the scaling of very high, flat, vertical surfaces. In due course, he and Mandy split. "She dreamed of hotel holidays with me, while I dreamed of hard climbs," he reads aloud from his autobiography.

That women might also have interests beyond family, or occasionally feel less than free, is awareness that seems never to have dawned. The mind drifts. *Psycho Vertical*? *Psycho* as in *psychogeography*? The deep engagement with place and history implied by that term gets no foothold here. Andy is only interested in Andy; we learn nothing about how or where he climbs. So – *Psycho* as in a dated pejorative for the mentally ill? One that happens to drag harm to women in its cultural wake? Maybe, but not only is the possibility of a personality disorder or other impairment not given serious consideration here, it's never raised at all. Which leaves us with Kirkpatrick just being shockingly horrible. His book, he says, was intended as an explanation to Mandy and his kids; but the suspicion he hit on in writing it

The ego sanction: Andy Kirkpatrick

was that, "I don't care. Ultimately, you don't really care about anybody apart from yourself."

The absence of platitudes and pleasantries is almost bracing. But the fact that Kirkpatrick so palpably enjoys his own mean-spirited egotism, and is not challenged on it, renders the film small and unenlightening. Perhaps its value rests in the reminder that, however much love and family are lauded as sources of fulfilment, there will always be people for whom they are burdensome or impossible. And we should maybe, mainly, try not to get pregnant by them.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jen Randall
Based on [the book] by Andy Kirkpatrick
Cinematography
Yosemite:
Ben Pritchard
Jen Randall
Alex Gorham
UK:
Jen Randall
Alex Gorham
Dom Bush
Nick Brown
Edited by
Jen Randall
Sound Mix and Design
Chris Prescott

Production Company
Light Shed Pictures

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Light Shed Pictures

A documentary portrait of record-breaking British vertical climber Andy Kirkpatrick. Via to-camera interviews and readings from his 2008 book, also titled 'Psycho Vertical', Kirkpatrick describes his route into a gruelling and lonely sporting pursuit. After a troubled and deprived childhood, from which his idolised father was largely absent, Kirkpatrick finds release in increasingly challenging climbing projects. This culminates in an 18-day solo attempt on El Capitan, a vertical rock formation in Yosemite National Park. Kirkpatrick details how he replicated his father's abandonment of the family, marrying a woman who wanted children only to continue prioritising climbing. He explains that he feels incapable of meeting the conventional expectations applied to the role of husband and father. His marriage ends, but his book becomes a bestseller and he finds recognition as a motivational speaker and comic.

Red Sparrow

Director: Francis Lawrence
Certificate 15 139m 59s

Bird of prey: Jennifer Lawrence, Joel Edgerton

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

As we are left to wonder whether several thousand dollars' worth of Facebook ads purchased by Russians undermined a presidential campaign that spent more than $1 billion across all media, the time seems ripe for espionage pap that has characters solemnly say things like, "The Cold War never ended" and "Take off your clothes, your body belongs to the state." That's right: sexy Russian assassins with big fur hats who kill with sex and piano wire are back, baby!

The best moments of *Red Sparrow* aim to emulate 1970s thrillers. (The book's author is a 33-year veteran of the CIA, so it's likely that these films motivated his decision to become a spook, whereas his actual experiences in intelligence were during the thaw and post-Soviet era.) Aside from the sustained, smothering paranoia, there's an opening sequence not unlike one of Francis Ford Coppola's finer attempts at ripping off Sergei Eisenstein, as the film crosscuts between Dominika Egorova (Jennifer Lawrence) dancing the lead in the Bolshoi's production of *Swan Lake* and CIA agent Nate Nash (Joel Edgerton) rendezvousing in a park with his high-level contact in the SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence service. As soon as their respective métiers are violently derailed – Dominika's femur is snapped when her dance partner lands on it, Nate is interrupted by the police and has to run to the American embassy – things calm down stylistically, never to recover. The rest of the formal flourishes are reserved for action scenes, which sometimes go over the line into horror gore.

But since the true weapon here is sex, such bursts of violence are sparse. Dominika's uncle Ivan (a de-muscled Matthias Schoenaerts, his hair slicked to make him look like Vladimir Putin) offers her a second career in the SVR – first on a voluntary basis and then as an option to escape death. She's sent to State School Four, a wintry academy presided over by an equally chilly matron (Charlotte Rampling); later on, Dominika accurately refers to it as "whore school". Since most of the recruits have already served in the military, their coursework focuses on arousal techniques and more than 50 shades of sexual humiliation: watching BDSM pornography with headphones, fellating on command, looking at footage of someone and stating what they want sexually and emotionally, and so on. Yet all these sexercises never really cohere into believable training, and director Francis Lawrence fails to milk them for their perverse erotic value – instead it's just medium shots of Rampling barking orders and the pupils looking sad or scared. (That all of the trainee assassins save for Dominika have bad haircuts adds a certain camp value – something that feels unintentional, which makes it even campier.) It's hard not to fantasise about this material in the hands of Paul Verhoeven, or someone else who could captivate while being actually shocking.

After she is almost raped by one of her fellow recruits, Dominika is dispatched to Budapest at the behest of Uncle Ivan, on assignment to entrap Nate. She's also given a pervy boss (Douglas Hodge) and an apartment that comes with a hostile fellow 'sparrow' (Thekla Reuten), who's cultivating a US senator's chief of staff (Mary-Louise Parker) to sell state secrets. The lack of fellowship among her comrades guarantees that, once Nate knows who Dominika really is, she immediately agrees to help the Americans; it also leads to some pretty satisfying spy games, which take her to Vienna and London.

Even more enjoyable is Dominika's

apparent inability to fit into the harsh life of intelligence extraction. Uncle Ivan repeatedly insists that she's a natural, but she makes rookie mistakes that get her badly beaten up and others killed – though all those state-underwritten murders eventually work to her benefit. (Her allegiance to Nate, whom she beds several times, is ambiguous throughout.) The film's 'happy ending' leaves unclear whether or not Dominika was an expert manipulator from the start or was shrewdly rolling with the punches, which makes the frequently clunky conversations about her emotional life after she's forced out of the Bolshoi even more fascinating. Is she just saying what men expect her to say? Is it the truth? Or is it a version of the truth? By the end of the film she's back living with her mother in a flat paid for by the state, which seem to be the only things she cared about apart from dancing. Her superhuman ability to survive and learn in extreme circumstances – rather than any skill at beating up henchmen – makes the film stand out from the crowd. Nevertheless, like the faux 70s thriller stuff, this should be considered the baseline of action/spy-film quality, not its apex.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Chernin
Steve Zaillian
Jenno Topping
David Ready
Screenplay
Justin Haythe
Based upon the book by Jason Matthews
Director of Photography
Jo Willems
Edited by
Alan Edward Bell
Production Designer
Maria Djurkovic
Music
James Newton Howard
Costume Designer
Trish Summerville

Production Companies
20th Century Fox presents
Chernin Entertainment
Executive Producers
Mary McLaglen
Garrett Basch

Cast
Jennifer Lawrence
Dominika Egorova
Joel Edgerton
Nathaniel Nash
Matthias Schoenaerts
Vanya Egorov
Charlotte Rampling
Matron
Mary-Louise Parker
Stephanie Boucher
Jeremy Irons
Korchnoi
Ciarán Hinds
Alexei Ivanovich Zyuganov
Douglas Hodge
Maxim Volontov
Joely Richardson
Nina

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Moscow, the present. Dominika Egorova's ballet career ends when her dance partner in 'Swan Lake' lands on her leg, crushing it. Meanwhile, CIA agent Nate Nash is sent back to Washington DC after a meeting with his SVR contact is interrupted by police. Dominika's uncle Ivan offers her work spying on a businessman for the SVR. While the businessman is having sex with her, a masked man garrottes him. Dominika is given the option of enlisting in State School Four, which trains 'sparrows' (assassins who use sex to gain information) or die. She goes to the school and 'graduates' after being almost raped by a fellow student. Dominika is posted to Budapest to obtain more information on Nate. After they both acknowledge that they're spies, Nate offers Dominika asylum in the US. She gets hold of classified discs from a US senator's chief of staff, replaces them with dummy discs and then returns the real ones to the CIA. She is sent back to Russia and tortured. Nate's contact reveals himself to Dominika and tells her to out him in order to carry on his work. Instead Dominika names her uncle; during the SVR's handover to the CIA, a sniper kills him. Dominika returns home to her mother, but soon receives another secret signal from Nate.

Scott and Sid

United Kingdom 2017
Directors: Scott Elliott, Sid Sadowskyj
Certificate 15 99m 57s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs? was the title bestowed by the late English writer B.S. Johnson on a collection of short stories published when he was 40. The phrase comes to mind while watching this exuberant piece of cinematic self-mythologisation, an equivalent alternative title for which might be *Aren't You Rather Unknown As Filmmakers to Be Immortalising On Screen the Process Whereby You Came to Be Filmmakers?* If aspiring artists sometimes start out with hopes of advancing their medium, making a statement or capturing a truth, here there's no such cover story: self-promotion is the totality of the project.

The purpose of *Scott and Sid* is to celebrate the existence of *Scott and Sid*. We see the formation of the friendship between the film's writers/directors/producers Scott Elliot (played by Richard Mason) and Sid Sadowskyj (Tom Blyth) when both are improbably hulking schoolboys; we see the tedious expectations of teachers and the histrionic demands of parents fail to throw them off their quest to be 'great'; and we see vague entrepreneurial endeavours rake in substantial profits. The whole thing is punctuated with arguments in which they exhort one another to 'dream' either a bit more or a bit less; and what we're left with in the end is... well, the film we've just sat through, which is over. On display is a strain of self-defeating hubris – who is going to care about the struggles of first-time filmmakers to make a film no one asked them to make, which isn't about anything except said struggles? – that might well have chimed with B.S. Johnson, whose frequent subject was the inner conflict between grandiose fantasy and lumpen practicalities, and whose entire brief oeuvre represents a troubled negotiation between autobiography and fiction.

The impression of watching events *that really happened* is ostensibly the whole point of *Scott and Sid*, and yet the film's presentation unstintingly emphasises fakery, from the fact that its 'teenage' boys are very obviously nothing of the sort to the depiction of their parents as grotesques out of Roald Dahl books. Our heroes' interaction with women seems similarly cobbled together out of existing cultural scraps – the cutesy ineptitude of British pop culture's defining adolescent Adrian Mole, the alternate romantic

Self-referential: Tom Blyth, Richard Mason

yearning and rank misogyny found among the heroes of 1960s 'kitchen sink' films and TV inheritors such as *The Likely Lads*, the lurid sexual humiliations of *Trainspotting* (1996) – rather than referencing anything that ever actually happened to either man. This culminates in a horrifying sequence in which, determined to lose their virginities, they approach a couple of women in a pub and ask them questions about their "boobies" and what makes them orgasm.

The detail of what Scott and Sid did to acquire their money, and why they ever wanted to go into filmmaking, is barely pencilled in. Just when it seems poised to give us some information on how this dream team of bolshie ne'er-do-well and clever outcast became successful businessmen, the film flits off and settles instead on more man-to-man chat about their friendship and respective 'dreams'. If Scott and Sid's closest relative content-wise is *Son of Rambow* (2007), another tale of mismatched young mates channelling life's challenges into independent filmmaking, it lacks that picture's intense engagement with movie fandom and creative practice: all we learn of Scott's cinematic aspirations is that he envies the wealth of famous directors. His question at the start of the film – "What's the difference between me and Spielberg?" – isn't one that the narrative attempts to answer. By the end, he's got as far as, "How hard can it be? We'll make it till it's made."

Perhaps the lack of a clear artistic motivation is just honest. *Scott and Sid* was made by people chiefly driven by their desire *to have made a film*. The ouroboros burps.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Scott Elliott
Sid Sadowskyj
Written by
Scott Elliott
Sid Sadowskyj
Adapted for the Screen by
Scott Elliott
Sid Sadowskyj
Steve Nesbitt
Director of Photography
Will Humphris
Editors
Andrew Morrison
Chris Gill
Production Designer
Lauren Hinley
Music
Ian Arber
Sound Recordist
Neil Hillman
Costume Supervisor
Shannon McCleese

©Dreamchasers Film Ltd
Production Company
A Scott and Sid production
Executive Producers
Simon Ray
Lyn Ray
Robert Austin
Nigel Taee
Richard Merryweather
Nick Penny
Jaime Dunster
Eric Young
Peter Young
Graham Fawcett
Stewart Sheridan
Gordon Lawson

Cast
Richard Mason
Scott
Tom Blyth
Sid
Charlotte Milchard
Karen
David Summer
Mr Olsen
Maggie Daniels
Mrs Finn
Andrew Porter
Nicky Watson
Colin Fox
Gavin Watson
Ranj Nagra
Mr Nanda

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Dreamchasers Film Ltd

UK, the recent past. Timid schoolboy Sid, whose chief preoccupation is supplying vodka to his depressed and alcoholic single mother, finally finds some enjoyment in life when new pupil Scott befriends him. Though less academic than Sid, Scott is ambitious and driven, with a cherished dream of making movies. When Sid has a run-in with bootleggers who sell illegal alcohol through his local shop, he and Scott turn the situation around and go into business with their tormentors. Increasingly lucrative joint projects, from cleaning to event organising, see the boys amass considerable incomes. Sid puts his mother into rehab. Eventually, the pair have the funds to make their film – 'Scott and Sid'.

The Square

Sweden/France/Germany/Denmark/USA/Norway 2017
Director: Ruben Östlund
Certificate 15 151m 26s

See Feature on page 38

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

As the world becomes increasingly saturated with visual media – with screens in our pockets, in restaurants, in elevators, taxicabs, vending machines and all sorts of places where they didn't used to be – our collective visual literacy doesn't seem to be keeping up. This is probably because arts programmes are the first to be cut in publicly funded schools, and when they do exist, it's on a specialised track. It's also undeniable that international art-speak (the semi-academic, self-important, totally incoherent language of gallery press releases and artists' statements) and the perceived frivolity of mid-century conceptual art (ie the 'my kid could do that' refrain) have undermined art's place in the public's interest.

Yet the cloistered, fundamental silliness of the contemporary art world is not Ruben Ostlund's target in *The Square* – that would be too easy. As with his previous films *Play* (2011) and *Force Majeure* (2014), Ostlund uses his setting to explore hidden inequalities in supposedly liberal societies, particularly those concerning masculinity, race and class, playing with our expectations about what is supposed to happen versus the results, which are always uncomfortable.

The Square is set in a Sweden where the monarchy has been abolished; the royal palace in Stockholm is now a non-profit gallery of contemporary art, aptly titled the X-Royal Museum. Christian Nielsen (played by the unequivocally handsome Dane Claes Bang) is head curator, competing with art collectors to get the latest and greatest works that question our relationship to space and the notion of being a good person. (Arrows pointing to and from the eponymous installation are labelled "I trust people" and "I don't trust people.") However, Christian's life is, like our own, grey to black: after having his mobile and wallet stolen (in a choreographed grift that could itself be performance art), he tracks the thief to a rundown apartment block and attempts to retrieve his property by distributing threatening letters to every flat. He quickly gets back the stolen items, but also begins to receive more things (cufflinks, other mobiles) and even an enemy: a small Arab boy whose parents have punished him severely because, thanks to Christian's actions, they believe he's a thief.

The fallout from this retrieval operation causes Christian to neglect his duties at work, which is why a wildly offensive YouTube video to promote 'The Square' gets his approval. (In it, a blonde homeless girl holding a pitiful-looking kitten is blown up inside 'The Square'). During the pitch meeting, the hip marketing guys start by stating, "Your competition isn't other museums but natural disasters, terrorism and controversial moves by far-right politicians." While this is undoubtedly true – the internet flattens outrage into a single continuum without any sense of the scale of importance of these very different events – Ostlund doesn't dwell on the point. Instead, like the internet itself, he simply moves along. Throughout the film there are many small gags and standalone vignettes – half-Tati, half-Vine – that take a stab at the contradictory, unequal nature of western liberalism. Ostlund never explicitly says that the museum's staff is diverse in name only, but rather shows how the one female assistant and one black assistant are stuck doing low-grade tasks (directing guests to exhibits, sorting out Christian's mobile) and are ignored during the YouTube presentation. Likewise, *The Square* never spells out the facile nature of the X-Royal's mission, but makes it perfectly clear through silent shots of the art (a giant pile of schoolroom chairs, for example), the disinterested visitors and Christian briefly admiring the work of a pet chimp.

Glimpses of life outside the museum frequently show people begging for change, nudging at the question of the prestige of helping art versus the often thankless task of helping the poor. The only beggar Christian decides to help insists he buy her a sandwich without onions, but he finds this request rude and so fails to comply. The mechanics of Christian's personal and professional downfall are completely tied up in this inability to interact with the world in a way he doesn't perceive as polite or self-protecting – he only bothers to do what he thinks is right for him, not what might be right for the other person. This plays out in his casual relationship with Anne, an American journalist (Elisabeth Moss). He is a man continually undone by the awareness of his privilege, and while the ending provides some sense of hope, it's tenuous. S

Heap thrills: *The Square*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Erik Hemmendorff
Philippe Bober
Screenplay
Ruben Östlund
Director of Photography
Fredrik Wenzel
Editors
Ruben Östlund
Jacob Secher Schulsinger
Production Designer/Art Director
Josefin Åsberg
Sound
Jonas Rudels
Sara Kristoffersson
Jesper Miller
Lars Wignell
Gustaf Berger
Artuu Kontkanen
Costumes
Sofie Krunegård

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Production Companies
Produced by
Plattform Produktion
In co-production with
Film i Väst, Essential Films, Parisienne, Coproduction Office, Sveriges Television, Imperative Entertainment, Arte France Cinéma and ZDF/Arte
With the support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Council of Europe - Eurimages, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Nordisk Film & TV Fond and Danske Filminstitut
In collaboration with Alamode Filmverleih, TriArt Distribution, Danmarks Radio, Goodbye Kansas
Executive Producers
Tomas Eskilsson
Agneta Perman
Dan Friedkin
Bradley Thomas

Cast

Elisabeth Moss
Anne
Dominic West
Julian
Terry Notary
Oleg
Claes Bang
Christian Nielsen
Christopher Læssø
Michael

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye

Stockholm, the present. While attempting to save a woman from a screaming man, museum curator Christian Nielsen has his wallet and cell phone stolen. With the help of his assistant, he tracks his belongings to a rundown apartment block. He writes a threatening letter to the thief and posts copies in the mail slot of every apartment in the building. The stolen items are returned the following day.

At the museum, Christian asks the marketing team to come up with an improved promotion for a new installation, 'The Square'. Christian is threatened by a young Arab boy who says that his life is ruined because, thanks to Christian's actions, his parents now think he's a thief. The boy wants a letter of apology, but Christian refuses; the boy swears vengeance. Distracted by this development, Christian approves a new marketing proposal for an offensive YouTube video. After a wild party at the museum, Christian spends the night with Anne, an American journalist. The video goes viral and causes a public outcry. Christian attends a museum benefit, where a performance artist pretends to be a gorilla and assaults people. Later, Christian arrives home to find the Arab boy waiting for him. Christian again refuses to apologise and pushes the boy down the stairs. The boy's cries for help go unheeded. Christian holds a press conference about the video, and resigns. The press criticise him for limiting free speech. Christian goes back to the apartment block, only to find that the boy isn't there any more. He tries to make amends with a resident while his daughters watch.

Status Update

USA/People's Republic of China/Canada 2017
Director: Scott Speer
Certificate 12A 106m 18s

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

Scott Speer's woeful teen comedy plays like a showcase for shaggy blond-haired Disney favourite Ross Lynch, who took the starring role in the channel's long-running show *Austin & Ally*. Here he plays Kyle Moore, who is transplanted from California to Connecticut after his parents' separation, and finds himself having to navigate the battleground of a new school. Although he befriends class geek Lonnie (Harvey Guillen) and falls for pretty singer Dani (Olivia Holt), Kyle remains despondent about his family situation – and the fact that he has been targeted by resident hockey jock Derek (Gregg Sulkin).

When Derek smashes his phone for no apparent reason, Kyle heads to the mall for a replacement, and there encounters a bearded, mantra-spouting kiosk owner (Josh Ostrovsky) who sells him a new handset preloaded with a social app called 'Universe'. Kyle finds that any status update he types into the app comes true, and so he orchestrates the return of his father, the downfall of Derek, a successful hockey career and the beginnings of a romance with Dani (sparked by a performance of Bruno Mars's 'Locked out of Heaven', complete with backing band and choreography, in the school cafeteria).

Of course, Kyle finds that there is a price to pay for his rapid ascension to the high-school big league, and the cost is his one genuine friendship with Lonnie – whose birthday meal he skips in order to attend a hockey party – and his burgeoning romance with Dani, which is put on ice thanks to the aggressive charms of Derek's ex-girlfriend Charlotte (Courtney Eaton).

That Kyle uses his incredible new power to bolster his social status, with no thought to those around him, is unsurprising in a genre populated by selfish adolescents; the same premise has been seen time and again in everything from *16 Wishes* (2010) to *Wish Upon* (2017). One can sympathise somewhat with Kyle's situation – after all, no one enjoys being the new kid, particularly at such a horrible school – and while it would have been nice to see him use his gift for the greater good, he's by no means the most unlikeable character on screen. The film is full of despicable individuals, from students to

iPap: Olivia Holt, Ross Lynch

teachers and parents. Kyle's father (Rob Riggle), for example, is a deadbeat who prioritises surfing over his kids and treats his wife like a skivvy. Music teacher Mr Moody (John Michael Higgins) berates his students for their limited talent in a way that's more abusive than humorous; at one point he makes fun of Kyle's singing for being "unmanly" – just one example of the film's rampant toxic masculinity. Even Lonnie's parents think so little of their son that they assume Kyle is a figment of his imagination.

Characters who aren't offensive are entirely one-dimensional. Dani is purely a pretty love interest, with no life of her own beyond Kyle's attentions; similarly, Lonnie (who is bullied, tormented and mercilessly fat-shamed) is only there to blossom under Kyle's friendship. Derek is 100 per cent nasty jock, Charlotte – and her appalling parents, including Famke Janssen as an embarrassing cougar – ruthless social climbers. Only Kyle's mother (a thankless role for Wendi McLendon-Covey) has any sense of depth, finally taking control of her life only for her leeching ex to return against her wishes.

For a film that's centred around social media, there's nothing of substance here about the way that technology has transformed the teen experience. A late heart-to-heart between Kyle and his put-upon mother, in which she tells him that social media is "bullshit with a filter", is the closest the screenplay comes to any pertinent observation; and it's also a particularly apt description of *Status Update* itself.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jennifer Gibgot
Adam Shankman
Nicolas Chartier
Dominic Rustam
Written by
Jason Filardi
Director of Photography
Russ Alsobrook
Edited by
Sean Valla
Production Designer
Liz Kay

Score Composed by
Jeff Cardoni
Sound Mixer
Donald Painchaud
Costume Designer
Lorraine Carson

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Production Companies
Voltage Pictures presents in association with Brightlight Pictures
A Voltage Pictures and Offspring Entertainment production
A DNA Pictures and Heyi Capital production
Produced in association with Soundford Limited
Executive Producers
Shawn Williamson
Arielle Boisvert
Jonathan Deckter
Jason Filardi
Mason Xu
Fan Dong

Cast

Ross Lynch
Kyle Moore
Olivia Holt
Dani McKensie
Courtney Eaton
Charlotte Alden
Harvey Guillen
Lonnie Gregory
Joshua Adam Ostrovsky
bearded dude
Gregg Sulkin
Derek Lowe
Brec Bassinger
Maxi Moore
Wendi McLendon-Covey
Ann Moore
Rob Riggle
Darryl Moore
John Michael Higgins
Mr Moody
Famke Janssen
Katherine Alden

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

US, present day. After his parents separate, teenager Kyle moves with his mother and sister from California to New England. Starting at the local high school, he befriends resident geek Lonnie, falls for band singer Dani and makes an immediate enemy of hockey star Derek. When Derek breaks his phone, Kyle buys a replacement at the local mall. The phone comes preloaded with a new social media app, 'Universal'. Discovering that his status updates come true, Kyle manages to reunite his parents, win over Dani and become the hockey team's new star, turning Derek into a social outcast in the process. When Kyle's new popularity attracts the attentions of Derek's ex-girlfriend Charlotte, both Lonnie and Dani are upset. Realising that he must take responsibility for his actions, Kyle apologises to his friends and deletes the app.

Sweet Country

Australia/France 2017
Director: Warwick Thornton
Certificate 15 113m 8s

See Feature on page 28

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

Like so many of the westerns to which it serves as a bold and compelling corrective, *Sweet Country* contains moments of great nuance and richness alongside others that are about as subtle as a blow to the head from a rifle butt. The latter description may fit the film's opening shot, the first of many fleeting, achronological images whose full context and significance only become clear at later junctures in Warwick Thornton's third feature, which is based on the true story of an Aboriginal man arrested and tried for the murder of a white man in central Australia in the 1920s. As the soundtrack fills with the noises of an offscreen conflict and an angry cry of "You black bastard!", the camera directs the gaze downwards to a pot of water heating on a fire. Already turbulent, the liquid becomes more so with the addition of a handful of dark powder and then another few handfuls of a white one. Evidently, the place this pot represents is just as ready to boil over.

As a western that foregrounds matters of racial divide and tension within a period setting but with a contemporary sensibility, Thornton's film is hardly unprecedented. Nevertheless, most of the seemingly noble-minded Hollywood examples that acknowledge Indigenous peoples' experience of colonial conquests still prioritise the redemptive arcs of white heroes, Scott Cooper's *Hostiles* (2017) being the latest in a lineage that includes *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972) and *Dances with Wolves* (1990). As for most Australian directors' forays into the territory, Aboriginal characters remain at their stories' peripheries even in revisionist exercises such as John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005). Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) could be seen as a partial model for Thornton's similarly ruthless story of a man of the wrong race on the wrong side of the law, but *Sweet Country*'s complexity and sophistication still mark it as a landmark work of Indigenous cinema.

Ironically, it's the second recent film by an Indigenous director to function as a subversive riff on *The Searchers* (1956), a movie that's surely as majestic as it is racially problematic. *Maliglutit*, the latest by Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk – who, like Thornton, made his international breakthrough with a Caméra d'Or win at Cannes – relocates the core elements of John Ford's revenge tale to a formidable corner of the Canadian north. In *Sweet Country*, Bryan Brown's dogged Sergeant Fletcher subs for John Wayne's crusty Civil War veteran, as his pursuit of Aboriginal farmhand Sam, wanted for the killing of a white stockman, sends the film's characters across landscapes as ruggedly beautiful as anything Ford and Winton C. Hoch captured in VistaVision. In the scene when Sam's wife Lizzie is raped by the violent, bigoted newcomer Harry March, Thornton pays explicit homage to the iconic sight of Wayne's darkened figure in a cabin doorway, though here we perceive the white man as a horrific threat, intentionally shutting the door and windows one by one so that his crime happens under veil of darkness.

Working from a screenplay by Steven

A history of violence: Natassia Gorey-Furber

McGregor and David Tranter – the latter an Aboriginal sound recordist who worked on Thornton's debut *Samson & Delilah* (2009), and whose grandfather was the source of the details about the original case – Thornton presents Ewen Leslie's rancher March as the unambiguous monster of the story. Yet the film invites a more varied consideration of its other Anglo-Australians. As Fletcher's belief in his rightness is shaken both by an act of mercy from Sam and by his own softer feelings towards the woman who tends the town pub, Brown allows his usual bravado to seep out in a slow leak. Though he initially seems just as brutal as March, Thomas M. Wright's white farmer Kennedy gradually adopts a more fatherly demeanour towards his mixed-race son, a development that seems less positive when we witness the boy assume his pa's attitudes to the 'blackfellas'. Likewise, the good intentions of Sam Neill's preacher Fred and Matt Day's visiting judge are duly noted, but their actions come to naught. As triumphant as it may feel to Fred, the construction of his church in the film's final moments seems more like a dark omen, given the historical use of religion as a softer, gentler face for the power dynamics of colonialism that are presented in such stark terms here.

Thornton's film benefits from exceptional performances from the whole ensemble, but it owes much of its power to Hamilton Morris as Sam and Natassia Gorey-Furber as the fearful, largely silent Lizzie. Try as they might to hide their rising anxiety, their bodies betray them via Lizzie's morning-sickness retching or – as he listens to what he believes to be the building of his gallows outside his cell – Sam's twitching legs. They are even less able to conceal the anguish they feel over their inability to protect one another from the indignities and cruelties that are their daily lot. Thornton makes sure that viewers feel those blows.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Greer Simpkin
David Jowsey
Screenplay
David Trainter
Steven McGregor
Director of Photography
Warwick Thornton
Editor
Nick Meyers
Production Designer
Tony Cronin
Supervising Sound Editors
Sam Gain-Emery
Thom Kellar
Costume Designer
Heather Wallace

©Retroflex Lateral Pty Ltd, Screen NSW, South Australian Film Corporation, Adelaide Film Festival and Screen Australia
Production Companies
Screen Australia and South Australian Film Corporation and Create NSW in association with Screen Territory, Memento Films International and Adelaide Film Festival presents a Bunya production
A Warwick Thornton film
Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance
Developed and produced with the assistance of Screen Territory
Financed in association with Adelaide Film Festival, Screen New South Wales, South Australian Film Corporation, Principal development and principal investment from the Indigenous Department of Screen Australia
A Bunya Productions film
Executive Producers
Craig Deeker
Christina Kennedy
Trevor Kennedy
Andrew Mackie
Richard Payten
Oliver Lawrance
Scott Otto Anderson

Cast

Bryan Brown
Sergeant Fletcher
Hamilton Morris
Sam Kelly
Thomas M. Wright
Kennedy
Ewen Leslie
Harry March
Gibson John
Archie
Natassia Gorey-Furber
Lizzie
Matt Day
Judge Taylor
Anni Finisterer
Nell
Tremayne Doolan
Philomac
Trevon Doolan
Philomac
Sam Neill
Fred Smith

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Thunderbird Releasing

Northern Territory, Australia, 1929. In a rural area where Aboriginals work for the white stockmen who control their former lands, Sam Kelly lives with his wife Lizzie and niece Lucy on the farm of Fred Smith, a preacher. Sam, Lizzie and Lucy are hired for the day by Harry March, a former soldier and newcomer to the area. While Sam is out driving cattle, Harry rapes Lizzie. Though unaware of the crime, Sam is sufficiently concerned by Harry's interest in Lucy to let Fred take the girl with him when he goes away on business. After visiting the farm of Mick Kennedy, Harry returns home with his workers, Archie and Philomac, Mick's mixed-race son. Harry treats Philomac cruelly and becomes enraged when the boy escapes. Believing him to be hiding in Fred's house, Harry threatens Sam and Lizzie with a rifle. Sam shoots him dead before escaping into the bush with Lizzie.

Enlisted to capture the couple, Sergeant Fletcher forms a posse with Mick, Fred, Archie and a young constable. During the pursuit, bushmen attack Fletcher's party and kill the constable. Abandoned by Fred and Archie, Fletcher continues the search but nearly dies of thirst while trying to cross a salt lake. Sam saves him, before escaping again. Fletcher gives up the search only for Sam to return to town with Lizzie, who is pregnant and can no longer travel. A visiting judge presides over Sam's trial. After the circumstances of the death come to light, the judge rules that Sam killed Harry in self-defence and releases him, angering the local whites. While returning to Fred's farm with Lucy and Lizzie, Sam is shot dead by an unseen gunman.

Tad the Lost Explorer and the Secret of King Midas

Spain 2017, Director: Enrique Gato, Certificate U 84m 53s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

This children's CG cartoon is a sequel to an animated film from 2012 that didn't actually have a cinema release in Britain. This explains the bewildering way the new film starts. Tad, a lowly construction worker, is somehow friends with a world-famous woman adventurer, as well as with a blundering undead ex-mummy with detachable limbs who shares comic-relief duties with a cartoon dog and bird. When the woman adventurer is kidnapped by villains, Tad's troupe embarks on a globetrotting adventure through tunnels and temples.

Perhaps the fact that a sequel like this can get a cinema release, even though many viewers won't have seen the original, is a wry reflection on audience expectations – many parents taking their children won't expect a cartoon to make sense anyway. All the same, the film is on familiar ground – it's a rerun of *Indiana Jones*, with less blood and more funny animals. My informal survey of friends with children suggests a new generation is growing up with 1984's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* as preteen home viewing.

Made in Spain, *Tad* is livelier and better produced than some cheap CG cartoons that end up in cinemas, such as 2016's abominable *Norm of the North*, but it's talky and crudely characterised. The climax rips off *Frozen* (2013), as Tad's kiss saves his beloved from turning into a lifeless statue. What was an empowering moment between two women in Disney's film is reduced to one more 'male hero saves his princess' here.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-directed by
David Alonso
Produced by
Jordi Gasull
Ghislain Barrios
Nico Matji
Álvaro Augustín
Edmon Roch
Gabriel Arias-Salgado
Producers
Ignacio Salazar-Simpson
Ricardo Marco Budé
César Vargas-Sanz
Screenplay
Jordi Gasull
Javier Barreira
Neil Landau
Story
Jordi Gasull
Javier Barreira
Film Editor
Alexander Adams
Art Directors
JJ 'Galo' García Galocha
Miguel Ángel Alaminos
Music
Zacarías M. de la Riva
Sound Design
Oriol Tarragó
Marc Orts
Animation Director
Maxi Díaz

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Production Companies
Mediaset España, Telefónica Studios present a Telecinco Cinema, Telefónica Studios, 4Cats Pictures, Tadeo Jones y el secreto de Midas AIEproduction production
In association with Mediaset España, Movistar+, Anangu, Antfunds
With the support of ICAA - Instituto de la Cinematografía y de la Artes Audiovisuales (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Gobierno de España), ICEC - Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals (Departament de Cultura, Generalitat de Catalunyá)
Made at Lightbox Animation Studios, Madrid
Executive Producers
Jorge Tuca
Javier Ugarte
Axel Kuschevatzky

Voice Cast

English-language Version
Trevor White
Tad Stones
Joseph Balderrama
mummy/workers/bad guys
Alex Kelly
Sara Lavrof
Ramon Tikaram
Jack Rackham
Gemma Whelan
Tiffany/henchwoman
Lewis Mcleod
taxi driver

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Spanish theatrical title
Tadeo Jones 2 El secreto del Rey Midas

When his adventurer friend Sara is kidnapped, hapless construction worker Tad Stones must embark on a search for the scattered segments of King Midas's necklace, which grant godlike powers.

12 Strong

USA 2018
Director: Nicolai Fuglsig
Certificate 15 129m 42s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

12 Strong begins with a brief news montage recapping relevant recent history – the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the 1998 US embassy bombings (Bill Clinton delivering the news), the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* (Madeleine Albright), Osama bin Laden in the mountains – all building to the main event of 11 September 2001. Save for an end speech from an Afghan warlord predicting that America's nation-guiding exercise will not go well, it's the only historical context in *12 Strong*, an unabashedly triumphalist exercise (based on Doug Stanton's non-fiction bestseller *Horse Soldiers*) that makes good on its trailer's promise to depict "the first victory in the war on terror".

Special forces officer Mitch Nelson (Chris Hemsworth) is at home with his family when the Towers are hit (his daughter, gawking at the TV: "Daddy, look!"). In short order he's at HQ, sitting around with fellow officers who are balling their fists and punching their palms, fidgeting for retaliatory violence. A month later (in almost no screen time), Nelson and his troops are in Uzbekistan, where they're given their mission: hook up with Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum (Navid Negahban) and provide targeted air-strike support for his horse-and-foot troops in a drive on a Taliban stronghold at Mazar-i-Sharif. Dismantling that base, it's said, will be a crippling blow to prevent further 9/11s, and that's that.

There is a token gesture towards the present reality at mission-accomplished film's end, when Dostum tells his American allies, "There are no right choices here. This is Afghanistan... You will be cowards if you leave, and enemies if you stay." This is a handy way to evade responsibility by eliding even the most basic discussion of disastrous US policy, past and present, and its long-term fallout. As former Marine and co-star Rob Riggle noted in an interview: "I don't want to get into the politics of it, but yeah, it's 17 years and we're still there." The idea of supporting the troops even if you hate the related war is an old

Saddled Thor: Chris Hemsworth

trope, but even taken most generously it's hard to apply to a movie so unashamedly bellicose.

Arguments have been had about the degree of ambivalence or outright pessimism in 'War on Terror' entries such as *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *American Sniper* (2014), less so the more straightforward thrills of *Lone Survivor* (2013). The latter sported a promotional tie-in offering free tickets to those who bought star Mark Wahlberg's muscle supplement, making a clear link with the 'hard bodies' action films of the 1980s, which frequently starred brawny Americans in scenarios allowing for the symbolic winning of the Vietnam War. *12 Strong* is firmly in that regressive vein: combat scenes are regularly punctuated by massive gasoline explosions, and the politics of national strength are unambiguous. "Let's get this war started," says officer Hal Spencer (Michael Shannon), before unleashing, per Nelson, "the greatest weaponry in history" in an opening bombing. The language is coach-before-a-big-game ("Go win this thing"), the results gratifying ("Feels good, huh? We finally saw one through"). But will the victory mean anything? "That's not up to us." Combat itself is against a group of troops led by Mullah Razan (Numan Acar), introduced executing a woman for teaching her daughters to read. Shot reverse shot is literalised in a particular form: whenever the angle cuts from US/ally forces to a previously unseen enemy combatant, it means they're about to be blown away.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jerry Bruckheimer
Molly Smith
Thad Luckinbill
Trent Luckinbill
Written by
Ted Tally
Peter Craig
Based on the book *Horse Soldiers* by Doug Stanton
Director of Photography
Rasmus Videbaek
Editor
Lisa Lassek
Production Designer
Christopher Glass
Music
Lorne Balfe
Sound Mixer
Rodney Gurulé
Costume Designer
Dan Lester
Visual Effects
Industrial Light & Magic
BUF
CVD VFX Ltd
11:11 MediaWorks
VFX Legion
Lion Visual Effects Inc.
Wink VFX
The Mill
MPC New York
Method Studios
a52
Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator
Mic Rodgers

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Production Companies
Alcon Entertainment, Black Label Media and Jerry Bruckheimer Films present a Jerry Bruckheimer and Black Label production in association with Torridon Films
Executive Producers
Andrew A. Kosove
Broderick Johnson
Chad Oman
Mike Stenson
Ellen H. Schwartz
Garrett Grant
Yale Badik
Val Hill
Doug Stanton

Cast

Chris Hemsworth
Captain Mitch Nelson
Michael Shannon
Hal Spencer
Michael Peña
Sam Diller
Navid Negahban
General Abdul Rashid Dostum
Trevante Rhodes
Ben Milo
Geoff Stults
Sean Coffers
Thad Luckinbill
Vern Michaels
Austin Hébert
Pat Essex
Austin Stowell
Fred Falls
Ben O'Toole
Scott Black
Kenneth Miller
Kevin Jackson
Kenny Sheard
Bill Bennett
Jack Kesy
Charles Jones
Rob Riggle
Lieutenant Colonel Bowers
William Fichtner
Colonel Mulholland
Arshia Mandavi
Najeeb
Elsa Pataky
Jean Nelson
Numan Acar
Mullah Razan

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

September 2001. Following attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, US troops are hastily assembled to deploy to Afghanistan. A group of 12 men, led by Mitch Nelson and his friend Hal Spencer, arrive at a US base in Uzbekistan, where they are chosen for a mission to meet with Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who seeks revenge on Taliban leader Mullah Razan for killing his family. Dropped into Afghanistan, the 12 are to provide air-strike support for Dostum's horse-and-foot troops in a series of attacks leading to the Taliban stronghold of Mazar-i-Sharif. Despite initial mistrust between the two sides, their early attacks are successful. When Dostum learns that a rival warlord might reach Mazar-i-Sharif before them, he withdraws his support. The US forces advance for their attack and are joined by Dostum at the last minute. The mission is successful. Dostum kills Razan. Spencer is injured in combat but survives. All 12 servicemen return home.

Westwood
Punk. Icon. Activist

United Kingdom 2018, Director: Lorna Tucker

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Cantankerous, sardonic, peculiar: fashion designer Vivienne Westwood ticks just about every box on a documentary-maker's wish list. However, Lorna Tucker opens her first full-length release – rather bravely – on a note of near-defeat, with her subject fidgeting restlessly in a chair, complaining that she can't bear to answer any more boring questions and debating whether to pull the plug on the whole idea. Maybe it's an act, maybe Tucker needs to work on her interviewing skills – more likely, Westwood is just a bit of a pain to work with. Luckily, the film not only survives this brush with potential cancellation but emerges as a palpable success, delivering a snappy, well-judged account of one of the key figures of post-war British counterculture, managing to stay sympathetic to its subject without disappearing down the rabbit hole of tedious sycophancy.

As a former model, Tucker presumably understands the fashion business as much as anyone really can, and this stands her in good stead as she follows Westwood's eccentric perambulations around fashion shows, store openings and frantic design meetings. The point is made that, unlike other British couture brands such as Alexander McQueen or Stella McCartney, 'Vivienne Westwood' is still very much Vivienne Westwood, herself, in the flesh. This, it would seem, despite the best efforts of CEO Carlo D'Amario, whose plans for such things as flagship stores in China are nixed by Westwood at the 11th hour because they don't feel right to her.

One thing that does feel right to her, though, is the input of her husband, her former student and now co-designer Andreas Kronthaler, who is gradually assuming more and more responsibility for the clothes. Westwood is at the enviable stage in her life where she can swoop in and throw a strop because, say, the ribbing on a cardigan is too skimpy. Andreas is the chief-stropper-in-waiting, and we observe him working on his skill set with an enormous meltdown over some socks. Meanwhile, though, he's working his own socks off, and convincingly demonstrates a rather touching love both for Westwood and for her legacy. She knew what she was about when she recruited/married him.

Frock star: Vivienne Westwood

But then, you get the impression that Westwood has always known what she's about. Her former partner, the impresario Malcolm McLaren, is no longer alive to dispute her version of the birth and death of punk, but you don't have to be much of a student of human nature to know that, when a woman tells you that her creative contribution has been first undervalued and then expropriated by a male collaborator, you should probably believe her.

Westwood's clothes made punk into a culture rather than a flash-in-the-pan music style, and when it lost its edge she dropped it in disgust. She then spent years being laughed at and ignored as she launched herself, furiously, at the locked gates of high fashion. Couture isn't supposed to be done by upstart women with northern accents – but the clothes have always spoken for themselves, and as the film powers through the decades of her designs, the same qualities recur: they are clever, they are charming, they are wearable. Westwood is clearly no saint, but she's very good at this. And there's something oddly cheering about watching her wobble off on her bicycle to fight the next battle on her list.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eleanor Emptage
Shirine Best
Nicole Stott
John Battsek
Cinematographers
Sam Brown
James Moriarty
Editor
Paul Carlin
Original Music by/ Conducted by
Dan Jones
Sound Design
Max Bygrave

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Production Companies
A film by Lorna Tucker
Dogwoof presents a Finished Films production in association with Dogwoof & Tdog Productions, Passion Pictures, Ocean Independent & Creative England, Sharp House
Produced in association with Dogwoof, Tdog Productions, Ocean Independent, Creative England and Sharp House
A Finished Films production
In association with Wallflower Film and Roxanna Films
Made with the support of Creative England through the BFI Network
Executive Producers
Anna Godas
Leo Haidar
Emma Dutton
Ian Sharp
Rebecca Joerin-Sharp
Andrew Ruhemann
Film Extracts
The Filth and the Fury (1999)

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary telling the story of Vivienne Westwood's career as a fashion designer and businesswoman. Westwood recalls her working-class childhood in Cheshire, and the frustrations of her initially conventional life. After her life-changing encounter with Malcolm McLaren, the pair become co-creators of the punk aesthetic, with McLaren managing the band the Sex Pistols and Westwood dressing them. Westwood describes McLaren's growing jealousy of her success and paints a picture of him as a selfish man who spitefully sabotaged her burgeoning fashion business after they separated. The film relates how the brand nearly collapsed, leaving Westwood penniless; she moved to Italy and pieced the company back together with the help of her CEO, Carlo D'Amario, who introduced a more realistic business strategy. At this time, Westwood met Andreas Kronthaler, who was her student and is now her husband, co-designer and creative director of the brand. His input has enabled Westwood to decrease her workload, but the film portrays her as a keen-eyed and vigorous figure, devoted to political causes and green issues, and determined to ensure that the company reflects her personal style and attitude.

Winchester

USA/Australia 2018
Directors: The Spierig Brothers
Certificate 15 99m 23s

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

Winchester's setting couldn't be more fitting. Just as the supposedly haunted Winchester mansion in California is a sprawling, seven-storey maze of random rooms, endless corridors and Escher-esque architecture, so the film is a meandering, nonsensical patchwork of genre cliché and lacklustre scares that fails to make a convincing whole.

That's particularly disappointing given the fascinating real-life figure at the centre of the story: Sarah Winchester, eccentric widow of Winchester Repeating Arms Company heir William. After losing her infant daughter to illness and then, 15 years later, her husband to tuberculosis, Sarah used her inheritance to transform her San Jose home. Work on the house continued, 365 days a year, until her death in 1922, at which point it was turned into the tourist attraction it is today.

That's interesting in itself, but writer-directors the Spierig Brothers have concentrated on the other intriguing aspect of Sarah's character – that she believed her family was haunted by the ghosts of the people killed by Winchester rifles, and that their spirits designed the house's architecture for their own ends. This is enough for Winchester lawyers to question her sanity and bring in a (wholly fictional) psychiatrist to evaluate her mental state.

And so Dr Eric Price (Jason Clarke), addicted to laudanum following the death of his wife, arrives at the house with the intention of debunking Sarah's claims. As horror gaslighting tradition dictates, this leads to an hour of him telling Sarah that she's crazy while writing off the strange things he encounters – including Sarah's young grand-nephew Henry sleepwalking with a bag on his head – as drug-induced hallucinations, before all hell breaks loose and he realises she's been telling the truth all along.

Gun crazy: Helen Mirren

Well, that's what *Winchester* would have you believe. There's no nuance here, no room for deeper issues of grief or psychological trauma to cast their shadows across the narrative. This is a straight-up ghost story, in which the souls of gun victims through the ages come looking for remorse or revenge. Those hell-bent on the latter are locked in rooms boarded shut by exactly 13 nails. That's not enough to hold them, however, when a powerful final spirit makes his presence felt. This is the ghost of a (fictitious) Confederate soldier who, distraught at the death of his brothers on the battlefield, is said to have carried out a mass shooting at the Winchester offices 20 years previously. Not only is this historically inaccurate, taking place more than 50 years before the first recognised gun massacre in the US, it is also a somewhat limp attempt at political commentary.

Indeed, in terms of its message, *Winchester* plays like *Thir13en Ghosts* (2001) remade by the anti-gun lobby and co-funded by the NRA. The fence-sitting is farcical: guns can, says Sarah, be used for both good and bad; victims can be both innocent and guilty. The Confederate ghost, for example, is seeking revenge for the death of his brothers at the barrel end of Union rifles, though he himself used a rifle on Winchester employees and is finally bested by... a rifle, albeit one with a magical bullet.

This convoluted narrative wouldn't be such a chore if it were lifted by decent scares. But everything is hewn from cliché: children with rotting faces, ghostly voices, rocking chairs in motion. Far scarier is the two-dimensional characterisation that reduces Sarah to a veiled madwoman, Dr Price to a drug-addled sceptic, and Sarah's niece Marion (Sarah Snook) to a woman who exists only to defend young Henry in the final scene. "I am a mother, a protector!" she shouts to the advancing spirits. "I am not afraid!"

And neither is the audience – which is unsurprising, given that *Winchester* is such a derivative, dull experience. Once can only wonder what film the fine onscreen cast thought they were making.

Credits and Synopsis

Directed by
The Spierig Brothers [i.e. Michael Spierig, Peter Spierig]
Produced by
Tim McGahan
Brett Tomberlin
Written by
Tom Vaughan
The Spierig Brothers
Director of Photography
Ben Nott
Film Editor
Matt Villa
Production Designer
Matthew Putland
Music
Peter Spierig
Sound Recordist
Gretchen Thornburn
Costume Designer
Wendy Cork
Digital Visual Effects
Cutting Edge
Stunt Co-ordinator
Chris Anderson

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Production Companies
CBS Films presents in association with Eclipse Pictures a Screen Australia presentation
In association with Screen Queensland and Film Victoria
A Blacklab Entertainment production
An Imagination Design Works production
A film by the Spierig Brothers
Filmed with the assistance of Film Victoria
Produced with the assistance of Screen Queensland
Executive Producers
Benedict Carver
Daniel Diamond
Tobin Armbrust
Andy Trapani
Brian Gilbert
Michael Burton
Bryce Menzies
Marc Schipper
Simon Oakes
Antonia Lianos

Cast
Helen Mirren
Sarah Winchester
Jason Clarke
Dr Eric Price
Sarah Snook
Marion Marriott
Finn Scicluna-O'Prey
Henry Marriott
Emm Wiseman
Nancy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

San Jose, California, 1906. Sarah Winchester, widow of Winchester Repeating Arms Company heir William, uses her inheritance to remodel her home into a sprawling mansion. She insists that the family is haunted by the spirits of those killed by Winchester rifles, and that these spirits are responsible for the design of the house. Enlisted by the company's lawyers to determine Sarah's mental state, psychologist Dr Eric Price initially puts various strange events down to hallucinations induced by the laudanum he takes following the death of his wife. However, the arrival of the powerful, vengeful ghost of a Confederate soldier finally persuades Price to join forces with Sarah to vanquish the spirit and lay it to rest. Peace is restored to the mansion, though building work continues until Sarah's death in 1922.

You Were Never Really Here

France/United Kingdom/USA 2017
Director: Lynne Ramsay
Certificate 15 89m 44s

See Feature on page 32

Reviewed by Kate Stables

A new film from Lynne Ramsay is always cause for celebration, her slim oeuvre, for a host of reasons, consisting of a handful of garlanded shorts and four strikingly original features over a 20-year career. Perhaps her poetic, image-driven style, lauded in *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* (2002), wouldn't seem a natural fit for Jonathan Ames's hardboiled novella about suicidal New York child-retrieval operative Joe (a haunted and brilliantly brutal Joaquin Phoenix), who stumbles on a high-up paedophile conspiracy. But the result is a stunningly lean and intense avenger *noir*, its thriller storyline studded with cryptic flashbacks and off-kilter violence. Where Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011) nimbly married 'bad seed' horror elements with arthouse interiority, this is a wholesale and exhilarating reimagining of genre.

Despite its *Taken*-style themes – a driven enforcer, a trafficked child and a shadowy network – Joe's mission to retrieve Senator Votto's runaway daughter is a propulsive, impressionistic piece, its hero as fractured as its narrative. There's a strong whiff of the New Hollywood of *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Hardcore* (1979) in Joe's near-psychosis, the political corruption and the traffickers' underworld. But the film's arresting colour palette, and its psychological-collage construction, which constantly overlaps Joe's PTSD memories of his violent father and army traumas with his equally dangerous reality, also suggests the influence of *Point Blank* (1967).

Ramsay, mistress of the eloquent, crystallised moment, hones the flashbacks until a single shot or sequence (a van full of dead Vietnamese girls, young Joe huddled in a closet) gives up its story at a glance. For all its violence (Joe's weapon of choice is a hefty hammer, swung with *Oldboy* fervour), it's a thin-skinned movie, a textured character study stitched around a thriller. Joe's senses are flayed by the whoosh and rattle of passing subway trains, his crunchy nutting of a passing mugger, the thudding knife-games he plays around his own feet.

Alongside the detailed sound design, DP Thomas Townend finds sharp, incongruous beauty in a wet child against a jade-green wall, scarred flesh in a blue-lit steam room, two bodies sinking into a lake's depths like a homecoming. Pared to the bone, and with minimal dialogue, the film's elliptical flashbacks force the viewer to work hard to piece things together. Densely and swiftly layered, they make the slow-burn first act, devoted to Joe's paranoid daily round, grip rather than dawdle. Occasionally, a dart of memory or fantasy so swift that it's confusing, rather than cryptic, sounds a note of wilful obscurity. Only one, a late dare at collapsing dream and reality, threatens to throw the story off.

Phoenix, creating the latest in a string of damaged souls anchoring films such as *Two Lovers* (2008) and *The Master* (2012), completely inhabits Joe, a role for which he won Best Actor at Cannes. A taciturn bear of a man, Joe is capable of great tenderness (fussing over his aged mother), harrowing despair and an infamous death-dealing prowess: "They said you were brutal." "I can be." With his childhood terror fuelling his adult trade, he is both victim and killer, turning his skills on himself in repeated near-suffocations. Treating him empathetically, as a tortured man-child rather than a Travis Bickle sociopath or *Hardcore* hypocrite, the film never looks sideways at Joe, facing his actions head-on.

Hammer horror: Joaquin Phoenix

In contrast, Ramsay films Joe's slaughter-packed missions with startling inventiveness and a lack of prurience. Our detached view of his rampage through the Manhattan brothel holding Votto's daughter Nina is via black-and-white CCTV, with 1960s girl-group ballad 'Angel Baby' a breathy, intimate accompaniment that skips sharply with the shift from camera to camera. Intent on avoiding thriller clichés, Ramsay gleefully wrongfoots the viewer by ending one of Joe's killings with a bizarre act of compassion: he lies on the floor, holding his victim's hand, as they sing along quietly to Charlene's 'I've Never Been to Me' on the radio, one destined for paradise rather sooner than the other. Around the darkly comic pop choices, Jonny Greenwood's retro synth score, electronica pulsing over percussion, pushes the action on. Thrumming with tension, and coupled with the film's gritty-tender feel and neon-daubed streets, it creates the same kind of taut, nervy energy that drove the Safdie brothers' recent *Good Time*.

The story propels the despairing Joe, like the eponymous Léon in Luc Besson's 1994 film, to seek a conventional redemption in saving the ordeal-numbed Nina (a terrific Ekaterina Samsonov). Yet *You Were Never Really Here* refuses to paint him as her white knight, giving them a gentle, battle-scarred parity. Melancholy and formally ambitious, right to the last, it's a film that reworks the male-rescuer template as deftly as everything else it touches. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Pascal Caucheteux
Rosa Attab
James Wilson
Rebecca O'Brien
Lynne Ramsay
Screenplay
Lynne Ramsay
Based on the book by Jonathan Ames
Director of Photography
Tom Townend
Edited by
Joe Bini
Production Designer
Tim Grimes
Music
Jonny Greenwood
Sound Designer
Paul Davies
Costume Designer
Malgosia Turzanska

©Why Not Productions, Channel Four Television Corporation and The British Film Institute **Production**

Companies
Why Not Productions presents in association with Film4, BFI, Amazon Studios, Sixteen Films and JWFilms
A film by Lynne Ramsay
Developed in association with Film4
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Jonathan Ames
Ben Roberts
Lizzie Francke
Sue Bruce-Smith
Rose Garnett

Cast

Joaquin Phoenix
Joe
Judith Roberts
Joe's mother
Ekaterina Samsonov
Nina Votto
John Doman
John McCleary
Alex Manette
Senator Albert Votto
Dante Pereira-Olson
young Joe
Alessandro Nivola
Governor Williams

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title
A Beautiful Day

New York, present day. Joe, an ex-Marine, is an efficient and brutal retriever of sex-trafficked children, killing and maiming their exploiters. He suffers PTSD flashbacks to his army and FBI service, and to his childhood with a violent father. Joe is suicidal and practises near-suffocation with dry-cleaning bags. He cares for, and lives with, his elderly mother.

Senator Albert Votto hires Joe to rescue Nina, his young runaway daughter, from a Manhattan brothel for paedophiles. Joe attacks the brothel's security staff with a hammer, and rescues the drugged Nina. Senator Votto's suicide is announced on the TV news. Corrupt police officers attack Joe in his hotel room and snatch Nina. Joe discovers that the lawyer who arranges his jobs has been tortured and killed in his office. Joe's mother has been shot dead at their home. He kills two assassins there, first ascertaining that Nina is being held by Governor Williams, Votto's colleague, who trades her with other paedophiles. Joe drowns his mother's body in a country lake; he attempts to drown himself with her, but relents, thinking of Nina. At the governor's country house, Joe finds Williams with his throat cut. Nina has killed him. She comforts Joe. In a nearby diner, Joe shoots himself dead at the table. Nina wakes him from his dream, telling him it's a beautiful day.

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Home cinema

Experimental error: Romy Schneider, as seen in *Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno*

INFERNAL CHEEK

Clouzot the master of suspense we know, but Clouzot the audacious avant-garde artist is only now coming into focus

HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT'S INFERNO
Serge Bromberg/Ruxandra Medrea; France 2009; Arrow Academy; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate PG; 96 minutes; 1.78:1. Extras: Lucy Mazdon on Henri-Georges Clouzot; featurette *They Saw Inferno*; filmed introduction by Serge Bromberg; Interview with Serge Bromberg

LA PRISONNIERE
Henri-Georges Clouzot; France 1968; StudioCanal; Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 106 minutes; 1.66:1.

THE MYSTERY OF PICASSO
Henri-Georges Clouzot; France 1956; Arrow Academy; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; 78 minutes; 1.37:1 & 2.35:1. Extras: documentary *A Visit to Picasso* (Paul Haesaerts, 1949); Man Ray home movie *La Garoupe* (1937); interview with Maya Picasso; featurette on restoration of the film.

Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy

It has been a long time coming, but the films made by French director Henri-Georges Clouzot late in his career are finally getting attention. For decades, the consensus has been that he made his best work in the 40s and 50s – *Le Corbeau* (1943), *Quai des orfèvres* (1947), *The Wages of Fear* (1953) and *Les Diaboliques* (1955); after that, his talent was on the wane. Like Hitchcock, to whom he is often compared, Clouzot had a supreme command of narrative, atmosphere and tension; this led to his anointment as a consummate craftsman. That reductive image, however, contributed to the dismissal of his later work by both mainstream and *nouvelle vague* critics. Clouzot was also an innovator who was not afraid to put himself at risk and demonstrated an uncommon willingness to experiment at the end of his life.

The audacious, searching streak that would flourish so spectacularly later on was there throughout his work. He followed the award-winning crime thriller *Quai des orfèvres* with a classic adaptation – *Manon* (1949), relocated from the 18th century to the immediate post-war period, so that it became a denunciation of the excesses of the Liberation period as well as a tale of destructive passion. Given the opprobrium *Le Corbeau* had attracted, including accusations of being anti-French, that took some courage. Clouzot continued to explore, trying his hand unconvincingly at light-hearted comedy with *Miquette* (1950); and then came *The Wages of Fear*, an experiment in existential tension that was wildly ambitious both in its narrative structure and in its challenging, dangerous production. *Les Diaboliques* returned to familiar thriller territory and a more manageable set-up, but broke new ground by incorporating elements of supernatural horror within a realistic crime story.

While shooting *The Wages of Fear* Clouzot met Pablo Picasso at a bullfight in Nîmes, and the seeds of a collaboration were sown. The result was the unconventional art documentary *The Mystery of Picasso* (1956). Clouzot wanted to show the workings of the painter's mind, the very process of creation. To that end he filmed Picasso painting on a transparent surface. We see drawings and paintings magically appear on the screen, stroke by stroke, constantly transforming as layer succeeds layer. The Belgian filmmaker Paul Haesaerts had used a similar device in his 1950 short film *A Visit to Picasso*, but Clouzot incorporated the idea into a double investigation of the creative process, filmic and painterly – with the twist that the works Picasso made during the shoot were subsequently destroyed, so that they exist only in Clouzot's film. The documentary shows artistic creation as fragile, always at risk of failing, of doing too much or too little. From the avant-garde virtuoso, the ultra-controlling French Master of Suspense learned that a work of art is never finished, but rather a constant process of transmutation.

Making the documentary clearly led Clouzot to think more intensely about his own creative process. Before these reflections bloomed into the bold experimentation of his later years, Clouzot made two films that were more subtly singular. The absurdist spy story *Les Espions* (*The Spies*, 1957) integrates elements from his previous

films and subverts the simple dichotomy of the Cold War. Its offbeat disillusionment proved unpopular, but it was followed by a big hit. Given that it stars Brigitte Bardot in one of her best performances, *La Vérité* (*Truth*, 1960) has been inexplicably neglected (though a restoration was screened at last year's BFI London Film Festival and there is hope of a home entertainment release). An elaborate courtroom drama drawing on Bardot's personal difficulties and the pressures of her exceptional fame, it is an indictment of the hypocrisy of contemporary society, which vilified and idolised the star in equally excessive measure. Pitching the free-spirited, sexually liberated youth that Bardot represented against the repressive double standards of patriarchal authorities, Clouzot moved into the territory of the *nouvelle vague*, revealing with customary ferocity the unsettling social dynamics under the fresh-faced insouciance of the young generation.

Seeing Fellini's *8 1/2* in 1963 was the trigger that fully unleashed Clouzot's artistic ambitions. He became interested in making another kind of cinema, more radical and formally daring, on a par with the contemporary experiments seen in other artforms. With so many public and critical successes behind him, he was given an unlimited budget by the American studio Columbia and cast one of French cinema's most cherished stars, Romy Schneider, in the lead. Work began on *Inferno* (*L'Enfer*), in which Schneider was the young wife of an increasingly jealous older man. The theme was once more obsessive love, but this time Clouzot approached it through a series of abstract visual and sonic experiments. Mixing colour with black and white, he drew on op art and kinetic art, and commissioned a score from serial composer Gilbert Amy. But ill health, fraught relations on set, the director's indecisiveness, the huge scale of the production and a location with an expiry date meant that the project had to be abandoned. All that remains of this megalomaniac adventure are extraordinary fragments: candy-coloured faces, shimmering flesh, revolving wheels of light, intricately designed paranoid delirium. They survive in *Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno*, the documentary that Serge Bromberg made in 2009 after a chance encounter with Clouzot's widow led to the recovery of 185 cans of film that had remained untouched for 45 years.

Many of these experiments were reused in *La Prisonnière* (*The Prisoner*, 1968), Clouzot's final film and his first shot entirely in colour. Thematically too, there is a strong continuity between the two films. An exhibition of kinetic art serves as a background for the sado-masochistic relationship that develops between Stan, a cold, domineering art gallery owner, and Josée, the sensual girlfriend of one of his artists. Simultaneously investigating art and love, the film establishes a parallel between the creative process and male/female power games, identifying voyeurism as a key to both. The dynamics of desire are correlated with the abstract patterns and repetitive movements of op art, creating an emotional and artistic maze of obsession which culminates in a spectacular psychedelic climax.

In keeping with the times, *La Prisonnière* is about sexual liberation but, as in *La Vérité*, Clouzot offers a complex take on a modish contemporary topic. The main characters try to free themselves from 'bourgeois' conventions or their own repression, but find only more entanglement. In dealing with their conflicting desires, *La Prisonnière* gets caught up in contradictions of its own: while the film's sympathy lies with the aspiration to meaningful love, it is clearly seduced by the dark allure of sexual domination. This ambiguous narrative of control and surrender is also the closest the director came to a self-portrait, in the unflattering depiction of Stan. At the age of 61, he was exploring new forms to express the troubling truths about the human soul he had confronted throughout his work, and this time it was unprecedently revealing. Clouzot's swansong was not just his most formally adventurous, but his most agonisingly personal.

From Picasso, Clouzot learned that a work of art is never finished, but rather a constant process of transmutation

Snap happy: Laurent Terzieff and Elisabeth Wiener in *La Prisonnière* (1968)

New releases

BLUE COLLAR

Paul Schrader; USA 1978; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 113 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentary by Schrader and Maitland McDonagh; BFI screenwriting workshop by Schrader (audio); interview with Schrader (two versions); introduction by Keith Gordon; trailer.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"If there's anything wrong with the movie," observes indie filmmaker Keith Gordon in his introduction on this disc, "it's that nobody's seen it." Paul Schrader's debut as director has certainly attracted less attention than it deserves.

Workplace films are often reckoned box-office poison. Even more so, perhaps, one as angry, radical and often downright Marxist as *Blue Collar*, whose attitude is summed up in Yaphet Kotto's tirade: "They just pit the lifers against the new boys, the young against the old, the black against the white. Everything they do is to keep us in our place." "They" is not just the bosses but the union, even more despicable because they pretend to be on the workers' side while pursuing the same divide-and-rule tactics.

Right from its bluesy opening – the thudding rhythm of Captain Beefheart's rendition of 'Hard Workin' Man' prefacing the metallic clashes of the factory floor – Schrader's film pulls us straight into the grinding repetition of working-class manual labour: in this case a motorcar production line. The three leads – Kotto, Richard Pryor and Harvey Keitel – carry total conviction in their sweat-grimed bolshiness; Pryor in particular, in a rare dramatic role, gives probably his finest performance on film.

It's the more remarkable that Schrader drew such effective performances from his leads given that – as he recalls in his commentary – all three hated each other and loathed him even more. Pryor in particular, "the unhappiest guy I ever met in my life", not only "accused me of putting him back on cocaine" but at one point drew a gun on him. Nevertheless, *Blue Collar* takes a caper narrative framework and transforms it into one of the most socially and politically acute American movies of its era.

Disc: A fine restoration; Jack Nitzsche's sinewy score comes up a treat. The generous extras include a 1982 interview with Schrader in two lengths: the 18-minute version broadcast at the time, and a 54-minute version of the full session.

THE CAT O' NINE TAILS

Dario Argento; Italy/France/Germany 1970; Arrow Video; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 112 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentary by Alan Jones and Kim Newman; interviews with Argento, co-writer Dardano Sacchetti, actress Cinzia de Carolis and production manager Angelo Iacono; script pages for lost ending; trailers.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

When *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* topped the US box office charts, Dario Argento suddenly found himself with the opportunity to get his second feature underway, and has been

New releases

pretty lukewarm on the results ever since, suggesting this detective thriller owed too much to Hollywood and lacked the distinctive qualities of his best work. He's partly right: casting Karl Malden as a blind sleuth and James Franciscus as a persistent reporter investigating a series of killings seemingly connected to a Turin genetics lab does bring a US-centric gloss to a storyline more generic and anodyne than anything else in the filmmaker's formative years. Still, while the wealth of suspects and paucity of motivation saddle us with a decidedly plodding hour in the middle, a bloody opening salvo and storming finale boldly illustrate the combination of imagination and craftsmanship that characterise Argento on peak form.

In 1970, the killer's handheld POV shot wasn't exactly new, but it is realised here with vivid conviction, while Argento's sheer chutzpah in putting the camera in the thick of shocking encounters with a moving train and a gaping lift-shaft was really ahead of the game. Though plot and character weren't ever really his thing, Franciscus's sheer professionalism and Malden's evident application in the face of a plot that makes scant sense carry proceedings along agreeably enough while we wait for the next bit of directorial flash and try to figure out just how female foil Catherine Spaak wove herself into a series of flamboyantly outré costumes.
Disc: Skin tones on the brand new 4k restoration are healthy without being exaggerated. A wealth of interview material and a valuable booklet add rich context, but the prize is the commentary by Alan Jones and Kim Newman which delivers insight and information with entertaining aplomb. Five-star treatment for a slightly lesser Argento offering.

THE COLOUR OF POMEGRANATES

Sergei Parajanov; USSR 1969; Second Sight; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 80 minutes (Armenian version) / 73 minutes (Soviet version); 1.37:1. Extras: short film *Kiev Frescoes*, commentaries by Levon Abrahamyan and James Steffen; documentaries: *Poetry, Pomegranates and Parajanov*, *Pomegranates Rediscovered*; *Free Parajanov!*; *The World Is a Window: The Making of 'The Colour of Pomegranates'*; *Memories of Sayat Nova*; *Parajanov: A Requiem*; booklet.

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Watching Sergei Parajanov's unique film-poem over the three and a half decades that it's been accessible to British audiences has felt like experiencing a glacially slow adjustment of focus, starting with a washed-out 16mm dupe of a purloined Soviet print and continuing through some equally compromised VHS and DVD editions. But in 2014 Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation and the Cineteca di Bologna restored it to what is probably the best that it realistically can look, given its notoriously troubled production, censorship and release history.

The film's many internal mysteries, too, have been elucidated over time, thanks to scholars like James Steffen, whose optional subtitled 'footnotes' are frequently revelatory, explaining not only the historical events in the life of 18th-century Armenian poet Sayat-Nova (the film is technically a biopic) but separating the specifically Armenian, Georgian, Persian and Azeri Turkic wellsprings that feed the film's astonishing creative flow. Steffen also highlights which elements were Parajanov's own invention, while also paying regular tribute to Tigran Mansuryan, whose music and sound design are an often undersung yet indelible part of the overall achievement.
Disc: Once near-definitive, Second Sight and Daniel Bird's 2011 DVD edition of Parajanov's masterpiece has been comprehensively superseded by this Blu-ray follow-up. This time, both 'official' cuts are included: the Armenian version that Parajanov personally approved (albeit not without compromise) and the more familiar Soviet re-edit by Sergei Yutkevich, each presented here with strikingly different colour grading. All of Second Sight's original extras are included (Levon Abrahamyan's audio commentary, Bird's feature-length documentary *The World Is a Window*, Levon Grigoryan's refashioning of deleted sequences into *Memories of Sayat Nova*), enhanced here both by newly commissioned pieces (Steffen's footnotes; items on the film, the restoration, and the campaign to free Parajanov from jail), a high-definition restoration of all that remains of Parajanov's cancelled 1965 film *Kiev Frescoes*, and Ron Holloway's hour-long *Parajanov: A Requiem*, until now the only reason to retain the old Kino DVD. A 112-page book caps what was clearly a labour of the deepest imaginable love.

GOLDSTONE

Ivan Sen; Australia 2016; AX1 Films; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 110 minutes; 2.35:1. Extras: scrappy cast and crew interviews, theatrical trailer.

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

No doubt there are talented white Australian directors who haven't yet emigrated to Hollywood, but it's blackfella directors like Ivan Sen and Warwick Thornton who are making most of the running in current Oz cinema. Sen's latest – as writer, director, cinematographer, editor *and* composer – appears here as a straight-to-video release, but its vistas of largely barren land and smart colour expressionism cry out for the big screen.

A frontier western, the film distils Queensland's shameful modern history into a tangle of conflicting interests; an opening montage of old sepia photos stresses the story's historical roots. Sen calls it a "spin-off" from his 2013 film *Mystery Road* rather than a sequel: it again stars blackfella cop Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen, extremely watchable), back on the bottle after losing his daughter in unexplained circumstances.

Madison's 'avin' you: *Magnificent Doll*

He fetches up in a tiny outback encampment clustered by a heavily protected gold-mining operation which works hand-in-glove with the local mayor. Swan is looking for a missing Chinese woman and discovers that she was a casualty of a lucrative human trafficking racket. Along the way he helps a local cop (Alex Russell) to find his inner decency and has his sense of his own identity upended by an encounter with an aboriginal elder (David Gulpilil).

The miasma of racketeering, racism, civic corruption and fake bonhomie cuts to the quick of Queensland as it flourished in the 1980s under the Bjelke-Pedersen regime, and suggests that things are not much different now. But Sen's real triumph is to meld his social-political critique (including an indictment of the blackfella-led Land Council) with cunningly stylised storytelling which blends genre conventions with the clarity and simplicity of a dream-fable in the vein of *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome.*
Disc: Fine hi-def transfer. The crudely edited cast and crew interviews (recorded at the start of the shoot) are awesomely uninformative.

MAGNIFICENT DOLL

Frank Borzage; US 1946; Arrow Academy; Region B Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: audio commentary by David Del Valle and Sloan De Forest; visual essay by film critic and novelist Farran Smith Nehme; booklet featuring essay by Nathalie Morris.

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

While *Jackie* and *Southside with You* (both 2016) dramatised events in the lives of Jackie Kennedy and Michelle Obama, this historical drama directed by Frank Borzage appears to be the only studio biopic yet afforded to an American First Lady. Dolley Madison, the heroine of *Magnificent Doll*, defined the role in many ways, playing hostess for widower Thomas Jefferson's White House and then standing by her husband James Madison's side for eight years. Ginger Rogers plays Madison in a story that places her romantic life in parallel with her growing political awareness. Having been married young and then widowed, Madison is courted by the dashing but increasingly devious and un-democratic Senator Aaron Burr (an all-too charming David Niven). She chooses her second husband on principle, though – James Madison (Burgess Meredith), not Burr, is the best man for the country. Glamorous Rogers may seem odd casting for this paragon of patriotism and wifely virtue. However, she excels in the emotional scenes, including the death of her first husband and a rousing, climactic speech to an angry mob. Also, her scenes with Niven soar, thanks to the sizzling chemistry between these two Hollywood sophisticates – which adds due significance to her subsequent choice. Meredith's Madison is sweetly devoted to his future wife from the first moment he sees her, too, making theirs an unexpectedly touching romance. This may be an earnest film, but it's lavishly costumed, gorgeously photographed and smartly choreographed. Rogers imbues her character with such charisma that one may wish she were elected to a higher office.
Disc: The delicious high-definition transfer is supported by three extras: an engaging commentary by David Del Valle and Sloan De Forest, an indispensable video

A FANTASTIC WOMAN

Once regarded as one of America's finest directors, Lois Weber was all but written out of film history. Now we can see what the fuss was about

FILMS BY LOIS WEBER

SHOES

Lois Weber; US 1916; Milestone; Region-free Blu-ray; 60 minutes; 1.33:1. Extras: new scores, archive films, commentary, featurettes, audio interview

THE DUMB GIRL OF PORTICI

Lois Weber; US 1916; Milestone; Region-free Blu-ray; 112 minutes; 1.33:1. Extras: new scores, archive films, commentary, featurettes, audio interview

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

In the 1910s, Lois Weber (1879-1939) was considered one of the most important American film directors, mentioned in the same breath as D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille. In the century since, like so many early female filmmakers, she has rarely even been mentioned in histories of silent cinema, and it hasn't always been easy to see her films. So the release of two immaculate restorations of her most important films on disc by Milestone Films is a moment of sweet triumph. Showcasing different facets of Weber's passion and creative ambition, these films are a perfect introduction to her work.

The films date from 1916, a decade into Weber's career. She began working in the movies in 1907, alongside her husband Philip Smalley. Both acted and directed; Weber also wrote screenplays. At a time when cinema had a dubious reputation, their relationship was a marketing boon – surely a respectable, middle-class married couple would make the sort of films that respectable, middle-class families would be happy to watch. Weber herself came from a very religious family, and had been heavily involved in the Church Army.

At the Gaumont studio, Weber was mentored by Alice Guy-Blaché, one of the world's first film directors; later, Weber continued to encourage and mentor other young women in the industry. In 1912 Weber and Smalley moved to the Universal studio, where they were given control of the Rex brand, initially making short one- or two-reel films but soon moving on to more ambitious fare, such as a feature-length adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1914.

Shoes, the shorter of the two Milestone films, stars Mary McLaren as Eva, a cashier whose meagre wages must support her entire family: her younger sisters, her frugal mother and idle father, who all live together in a cramped tenement flat. At this time, Weber was Universal's highest paid director, and she was determined to use her platform to speak up for women less fortunate than herself. In an interview to promote the release of *Shoes*, she said: "I did missionary work in the slums of New York... especially among young girls... I know them and their problems, and not a few of my stories have been suggested by incidents recalled from those early experiences."

Out of the shadows: Lois Weber at work

Eva's father's idleness and greed means that she can't afford to replace her shoes, which she has worn to destruction going to work each day. Her only option is to accept the advances of a sleazy loiterer called Charlie – a chilling fantasy sequence makes clear what this moral compromise means for Eva's future. It's a haunting film, shot with great care for the nuances of McLaren's intelligent performance and with a sharp attention to the details of Eva's penury, her attendant mortification and the insidious nature of her dilemma. Extras on the disc include an invaluable commentary track by Shelley Stamp, a demonstration of the remarkable restoration work, and a sensitive score by Donald Sosin and Mimi Rabson. Most intriguingly, the disc includes *The Unshod Maiden* (1932), the sneery sound rerelease of *Shoes*, which adds a joky voiceover to poke fun at Eva. An interview with the film historian Richard Koszarski explains exactly what this kind of spoof was all about.

The second film is a jewel in silent cinema history. Carl Laemmle once said he "would trust Miss Weber with any sum of money that she needed to make any picture", and *The Dumb Girl of Portici* was the most expensive project Universal had ever taken on. Thanks to this title, starring none other than Anna Pavlova, Weber may well be the only female filmmaker as yet to have directed a true studio epic. The film – based on Auber's 1828 opera *La Muette de Portici* – tells the story of Fenella (Pavlova), a peasant girl in 17th-century Spanish-occupied Naples, who finds herself at the heart of a bloody revolt after being seduced by a nobleman. Pavlova is electric on screen, from a haunting prologue in which she dances in white against a black backdrop, to her wild, barefoot scenes on the beach. She's a remarkably effective dramatic actress too, demonstrating a vivid expressiveness. The film contains some of Weber's best work, with thrilling tracking shots through the violence and devastation of revolution. John Sweeney's gorgeous new orchestral score, which takes inspiration from Auber's music, underlines the scale of the struggle as well as the smaller human dramas perfectly. Extras on the disc include a 1935 feature-length documentary on Pavlova called *The Immortal Swan* and rare silent footage of the dancer in action.

Weber was Universal's highest paid director, and determined to use her platform to speak up for less fortunate women

With increasing interest in Weber, and more of her films becoming available in such carefully presented editions as these, we can begin to hope she will take back the status she once held. Too much time has already been wasted. S

Television by Robert Hanks

THE MAIN CHANCE

1969-75 UK; Yorkshire Television/Network; Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 2,310 minutes; 4:3. Features: image galleries.

There will be counter-examples I haven't thought of, but as a rule of thumb British television drama divides into the metropolitan and the provincial, London and the rest; and one of the virtues of *The Main Chance* is the way it straddles the two. The first episode shows David Main (John Stride), a successful London lawyer, getting his hooks into a practice in his hometown, Leeds; and the action thereafter switches briskly between the two cities). No doubt this had a lot to do with the economics of filming on location in Yorkshire Television's home patch, but they allowed for storylines with a penthouse-to-pavement breadth.

The series stands out, too, for the unselfconscious complexity of its legal cases – presumably thanks to John Batt, the solicitor who with Edmund Ward (*The Hanged Man*; *Turtle's Progress*) created the series and who is credited as legal adviser. Plots are rigidly realistic about rules of evidence and procedure, even when these interfere with dramatic neatness; the gap between what the law permits and what feels like justice provides tension, though not often an unequivocal moral point. The great plot motor, though, is Main's ruthless competitiveness ("I'm going to walk all over him until my feet get tired," he says of one opponent: "Then I'm going to take a small rest and walk all over him again"). Not that he's much keener on destroying other people than on destroying himself. He has several wrecked romances along the way (glamour interest provided by first wife Kate O'Mara, aristo secretary Anna Palk, and Swedish girlfriend Sharon Maughan, before she found fame in the Gold Blend coffee ads).

Fleeting happiness with second wife Estelle Kohler ends when she is hit by a drunk lorry-driver at the start of the final series, triggering a *Hell Drivers* subplot and tempting Main to sail that bit too close to the wind: struck off, he retreats to a provincial town to start again. By now, the series was showing signs of strain – an impression enhanced by the replacement of the original, very 60s opening theme, driving beat and harpsichord in the mould of *The Prisoner*, with a chat-show chic tune by Anthony Isaac. Still, over four seasons the series keeps standards high, craftily plotted and sharply paced. *The Main Chance* seems to have given employment to half of Equity at one time or another, with some thoughtful roles for women, including Margaret Ashcroft as Main's in-house competition. At the centre, Stride is brisk and intense, with a continual sense of cogs whirring.

Disc: No surprise that some of the older episodes have muddy sound and picture – I'm not sure if the first series is in black and white because that's how it was filmed or whether that's all that survived; later series are very clean.

GHOST IN THE WATER

Renny Rye; 1982 UK; BBC/Simply; Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 58 minutes; 16:9. Feature: archive *Blue Peter* clip.

Renny Rye's career followed an interesting arc in the 80s and 90s, moving through the beloved children's fantasy series *The Box of Delights* to Dennis Potter (the not much liked double-coda of *Cold Lazarus* and *Karaoke* in 1996). Before that was this atmospheric ghost story, broadcast on children's television on New Year's Eve 1982. Fourteen-year-old Tess is afflicted by dreams and visions after starting a local history project at school; project partner David plays Scully to her Mulder, while considerately agreeing never to speak to her in public for fear of classroom gossip.

The frights are feeble, but the Dudley locations and casual domestic details – the canister of Vim on the side of the bath – are enjoyable, and a reminder of the English ghost story's habitual elitism, as if only the well-off might have unfinished business important enough to tie them to this sphere. Hilary Mason, the blind seer in *Don't Look Now* (1973), is grievously underused as Tess's harmless Nan.

Disc: Perfectly OK. The *Blue Peter* clip – in effect, a trailer – is disappointingly short, but Peter Duncan fans won't mind.

Real Women What stymies it are assumptions about women's roles: though superficially Bechdel-compliant, the script revolves around relationships with men

REAL WOMEN

Phil Davis; 1998-99 UK; BBC/Simply; Region 2 DVD; Certficate 12; 345 minutes; 16:9.

Watching this, I kept thinking about Tony Grounds's *Births, Marriages and Deaths* (1999): both series concern a group of working-class schoolfriends reunited in middle age for a wedding; they were filmed in the same part of London, around Islington; there's even the coincidence that Phil Davis, who starred with Ray Winstone and Mark Strong in *Births...*, directed *Real Women*. But the Grounds is so much darker, stranger, more inventive and entertaining. The two series of *Real Women* are patchy: a cheeky dismissal of an over-eager male ("E wasn't after the full service, just a quick oil-change") is immediately followed by the dismally dull "Men, they're all the bloody same." But what stymies it are assumptions about the roles women play, the motives they are permitted to have: though superficially Bechdel-compliant, Susan Oudot's script revolves around relationships with men – husbands uncaring or suffocatingly coddling, lovers prospective and actual. Only Lesley Manville's teacher breaks the pattern, though she spends most of the first series in a ferment of anxiety about whether she can admit to her oldest friends that she likes girls (gosh, 20 years can feel like a long time).

But audiences watched this for the stars – in British TV terms, incandescent: man-trap Michelle Collins, put-upon but unsinkable Pauline Quirke, cougarish magazine maven Frances Barber, and querulous, pregnancy-obsessed Gwyneth Strong.

Disc: Perfectly OK.

New releases

essay in which Farran Smith Nehme details Rogers's dramatic career and a fascinating essay by Nathalie Morris.

MICHAEL

Carl Theodor Dreyer; Germany 1924; Eureka Masters of Cinema; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 90 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: audio commentary by Dreyer biographer Casper Tybjerg; visual essay by David Cairns; 1965 audio interview with Dreyer.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Notwithstanding the long-established reputation of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) as one of the absolute pinnacles of silent cinema, it's still hard to understand how this outstanding Berlin-shot chamber drama from 1924 isn't better known. This Blu-ray issue of a new 2K restoration by Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung (replacing Eureka's pre-restoration 2004 DVD release) offers a pristine presentation of a film which perhaps doesn't sufficiently match the Dreyer template – slow, austere, spiritual – to have ever felt like part of the master's canon. Amid the opulent *fin-de-siècle* setting of a famous painter's mansion, what plays out here, as an older artist's affections for his youthful male muse make him vulnerable to heart-breaking exploitation, seems closer to Fassbinder territory than anything we'd expect from Dreyer. Arguably, the purity of the senior partner's great love (requited or not) comes with Christian overtones – crucifixes are a frequent motif in the art direction – yet the looks and glances caught in Dreyer's to-and-fro of telling close-ups mark out an interior space where yearning emotions provide the leverage in shifting power relationships.

Given that Dreyer clearly views the homosexual element in the central partnership as equivalent to the doomed hetero romance unfolding in counterpoint amid the artist's aristocratic circle, it all seems incredibly modern. The tone is understated, trusting in the audience's emotional intelligence, and also subtly suggesting we don't take the pretensions of these art-world types as seriously as they take themselves. Yet Dreyer has his cast – including the Danish film director Benjamin Christensen and future Hollywood character stalwart Walter Slezak – utterly invested in their characters' deep feelings, achieving a captivating sense of intimacy that looks forward to *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. One remarkable sequence cuts from gaze to gaze in what the critic David Cairns, in his spot-on video-essay, astutely describes as "triangulation". Every thought is readable on the actors' faces, the dramatic conflict precisely delineated, and in that very moment we can sense cinema changing in front of us from a record of theatrical tableaux to a new artform shaped by the nuances of thought and expression.

Disc: There's a shimmering delicacy to this new restoration, showcasing the artistry of ace cameraman Karl Freund (also seen in a comic cameo as a sly art-dealer). Elsewhere, Dreyer biographer Casper Tybjerg's contextualising commentary is definitive, David Cairns's complementary video piece highly accomplished, and the chance to hear from Dreyer himself in a 1965 audio interview a splendid bonus. A revelatory film, a superlative release.

Revelation: *Michael*

FILMS BY MIKE NICHOLS

THE FORTUNE

Mike Nichols; US 1975; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 88 minuutes; 2.35:1. Extras: audio commentary with Nick Pinkerton; *Mike Nichols and Elaine May in Conversation* (2006, 69 mins); Kyle Stevens on *The Fortune* (2017, 6 mins); isolated music and effects track; booklet with new essay by Martyn Conterio.

WOLF

Mike Nichols; US 1994; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 125 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: *The Beast Inside: Creating 'Wolf'* (2017, 54 mins); never-before-seen archival interviews; B-roll footage; original theatrical trailer; booklet with new essay by Brad Stevens.

Reviewed by Craig Williams

As director Mike Nichols's only real experiments with genre, *The Fortune* (1975) and *Wolf* (1994) make for an intriguing pairing. The former, a 1920s-set caper, stars Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson as a pair of hapless con men who kidnap an heiress (Stockard Channing) to bamboozle her out of an inheritance. The Great Depression cast a potent spell over the New Hollywood auteurs; the movement was born with *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and *The Fortune* came hot on the heels of *Paper Moon* (1973), *The Sting* (1973) and *Thieves Like Us* (1974). The stars were aligned and hopes were high, but the picture was a bomb.

Its reputation as a grand folly is exaggerated, but it's a curiously arrhythmic screwball comedy, too lethargic to work as genre revival in the vein of Peter Yates's *For Pete's Sake* (1974), too rote to work as a revisionist spin in the spirit of Peter Bogdanovich's *They All Laughed* (1981). It would be another eight years before Nichols made his next fiction film, *Silkwood* (1983), which set the tone for much of his work in the 1980s and early 1990s – prestigious, often female-focused adult dramas. A contemporary *Daily News* review called *The Fortune* "a painful illustration of the limits of the star system".

Almost 20 years later, *Wolf* demonstrated the power of the Hollywood star machine as it entered its modern imperial phase, the poster even crediting its stars – Nicholson and Michelle Pfeiffer – by surname only. This was part of a surge of horror revivals – it followed Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and preceded Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) by a matter of months. With its world of cut-throat corporate politics and suffocating bourgeois strictures, *Wolf* is tuned in to its era and Manhattan milieu; it's audacious on Nichols's part to play it as a straight werewolf picture, complete with Rick Baker make-up and Ennio Morricone score. It is the familiar Mike Nichols drama – a richly theatrical relationship study – projected as a horror movie.

More intriguing still is the way the picture becomes a self-aware film about the Nicholson persona. In *The Fortune*, he's just Beatty's dim-witted sidekick, but in *Wolf* he recapitulates the roles, the gossip and the legends of the intervening decades – he is lupine, insatiable and dangerous. The portrayal brings the actor and director full circle, recalling the moment this Nicholson persona was born: sitting naked in a chair, legs crossed and cigarette in hand in *Carnal Knowledge* (1971).

Disc: The real highlight is *Mike Nichols and Elaine May in Conversation*, an onstage chat between the former comedy partners (May also did uncredited work on the *Wolf* screenplay).

FILMS BY PETER NICHOLS

A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG

Peter Medak; UK 1972; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region-free Blu-ray and DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 106 minutes; 1.66:1. Features: commentary by Peter Medak and Sam Dunn; interviews with Peter Nichols and Janet Suzman; trailer; image gallery; booklet.

THE NATIONAL HEALTH

Jack Gold; UK 1973; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region-free Blu-ray and DVD dual format; Certificate PG; 95 minutes; 1.75:1. Features: commentary by Jim Dale and Nick Pinkerton; interview with Peter Nichols; trailer; image gallery; booklet.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

For decades now, discussion of Peter Nichols's career has been dominated by a narrative – promoted largely by the playwright himself – of neglect and disappointment: when, in the audio commentary for *The National Health*, Nick Pinkerton asks Jim Dale for his impressions of the man, what he comes up with is Nichols's bitterness at how little money he's made.

The two interviews with Nichols on these discs don't disappoint: filmed last year, astonishingly youthful and sharp at 90, he dwells on the ways in which the films fail to live up to the stage originals. *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, his partly autobiographical play of 1967 about bringing up a profoundly disabled child, was "light comedy" (not 'black comedy', he insists, because he doesn't want to numb the audience's feelings); but director Medak and producer David Deutsch, made it "sentimental". He blames himself, as screenwriter, for overegging the spoof *Dr Kildare*-ish doctor-nurse romance that sits within the grimmer hospital drama of *The National Health* – it doesn't fit on screen, he reckons.

Though he is right about where the films' flaws lie, he's wrong about how much they matter: these are fascinating, bleak, funny one-offs, in some ways more challenging now than 40-odd years ago. In *Joe Egg*, the shock-value of the comic games that Bri and Sheila (Alan Bates and Janet Suzman) play around their "wegetable" daughter Josephine is muted: the film gives more space to Bri's sexual frustration (cue leering shots of Suzman's breasts). The problems posed by the play's stagier devices – speeches that breach the fourth wall, realist dialogue breaking out into music-hall skits – aren't solved. But the outrage survives,

New releases

and the confusion – is it their suffering, or Joe's, or our own embarrassment that is so hard to cope with? Good to see Peter Bowles and Sheila Gish as well-meaning friend Freddie and less well-meaning wife Pam – marvellous stage actors who never did enough film work.

The National Health – a huge hit for the National Theatre in 1969 – is less shocking but harder to pin down. Nichols pooh-poohs the idea that it is a state-of-the-nation play, despite the title, the spectrum of regional accents, and the echoes of imperial glory in the ward names – Scutari, Sherpa Tensing – in this crumbling London hospital. The mostly elderly male patients of Battenberg ward, with their undignified and debilitating conditions, do seem to circle around intractable problems of Britishness, in the persons of alcoholic ex-soldier Loach (Colin Blakely) and the creepily ingratiating but vaguely posher Ash (Clive Swift), a former public school teacher who doesn't quite seem to grasp how the 'former' part fits with his enthusiasm for the company of boys. Ward life is punctuated by extracts from *Nurse Norton's Affair*, the hospital soap in which Jim Dale's cynical porter becomes a glamorous surgeon and the overworked nurses (Eleanor Bron, Sheila Scott-Wilkenson) become alluring, lovelorn heroines. It's is evidently a comedy, but of an unfamiliar kind. This may be Nichols's problem: we lack categories for the things he's good at.

It's frustrating that Dale, by all accounts revelatory at the National, gets no more than a couple of moments of chilling indifference to his calibre; interesting to see Scott-Wilkenson and Neville Aurelius in central roles, at a time when British cinema was not at all good at foregrounding black actors.

Discs: Nichols himself is terrific, and Indicator's restorations are superb: the washed-out palette of John Coquillon's marvellous cinematography in *The National Health*, Bristol's gorgeous shabbiness as filmed by Ken Hodges in *Joe Egg*, are bewitchingly crisp.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

George A. Romero; USA 1968; Criterion UK; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 96 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: *Night of Anubis*, a work-print edit of the film; short film featuring Frank Darabont, Guillermo del Toro and Robert Rodriguez; 16mm dailies reel; short film featuring co-screenwriter John A. Russo; two audio commentaries; archival interviews; newsreels from 1967.

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* has been many things to many people – an encapsulation of the American zeitgeist in the violent, paroxysm-seized year of 1968, a sly commentary on race relations, a work of preternatural wokeness – though much of the commentary on the picture, and on Romero's filmography as a whole, tends to prune the thorniness of what are messy movies so that they read as smooth social-political commentary tracts. Everyone remembers, for example, that Duane Jones's calm, composed, collected African-American hero gets popped in the head by a redneck vigilante squad at the end of *Night*, but it's more often forgotten that the calm, composed, collected hero supports a plan of action that leads to the death of everyone he's trying to protect,

Die harp: Orchestra Rehearsal

and that, as Karl Hardman's bald, hysterical, Republican-visaged blowhard keeps insisting, the cellar really is the safest place in the house to hide.

People may go on making *Night of the Living Dead* into whatever they want it to be, but the one undeniable fact is that it is a movie about dead bodies that walk, dead bodies driven by an overwhelming desire to devour the flesh of the living, seen orgiastically gorging themselves on slippery viscera, gristle, and skin. In this first film of what would become Romero's *Dead* franchise there is some lame, halfhearted attempt, via television news footage, to explain this phenomena by way of an errant space probe, but at bottom the intuitive, inevitable, claustrophobic movie understands the irreducible horror of its premise. It is a guttural yawp from the grim guts of American cinema, as revolutionary in its significance as Johnny Rotten's mocking snarl a few years later. Finally, who can blame the metaphor graspers – talking about what it's about is far less troubling than looking at what it is.

Disc: A movie that has suffered more ignoble home video releases than just about any in history gets something like the definitive treatment. Ample features range from fascinating – a video dedicated to Romero's bold use of library music for his score – to flatus; it is impossible to imagine three filmmakers I would less like to hear talk about Romero than Frank Darabont, Guillermo del Toro and Robert Rodriguez.

ORCHESTRA REHEARSAL

Federico Fellini; Italy 1978; Arrow; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 72 minutes; 1.78:1. Extras: interview with Richard Dyer; video essay by John Baxter; essay by Adrian Martin

Reviewed by Geoff Andrew

Made for Italian television after the frustrating experience of *Fellini's Casanova*, this 'documentary' – though, given the actors' 'colourful' performances, it's soon apparent that it's no such thing – is arguably the writer-director's most political film. It purports to be a live recording made by a TV crew of an orchestra rehearsing a piece of music (by Nino Rota, naturally) in an ancient Roman oratory; the musicians speak to camera about their respective instruments, banter with and play practical jokes on one another (condoms stuffed into trumpets, bassoonists blowing fart sounds), and variously offer resistance to the dictatorial demands of their conductor. Eventually, violent anarchy breaks out, until a semblance of unprecedented, literally harmonious unity is restored by a *deus ex machina* in the shape of an apocalyptic wrecking ball.

So far, so allegorical: made when Italy was rocked by the activities of the Red Brigades (including the kidnapping and killing of former prime minister Aldo Moro), *Orchestra Rehearsal* features troublesome trade unionists, communist sloganeers, a conductor given to lapsing into German rants reminiscent of Hitler, and fogeys waxing nostalgic about the old order. Accompanying the opening credits with the cacophonous sound of Italian traffic, Fellini clearly saw the film as a satirical reflection on the chaotic and incoherent state of the nation. But the narrative is likewise chaotic and incoherent: the humour is mostly broad and puerile, the (badly dubbed) banter often banal and inconsequential, the characters grotesque caricatures. (That said, all this being par for the course in much of Fellini's work, many of his fans may adore the film.) Especially dispiriting, given that Rota was frequently on set to advise, are the perfunctory performances of actors who behave as if they've never seen anyone play a violin or a trombone; evidently, Fellini, who had no interest in classical music, just couldn't be bothered to get such obvious visual details right.

Disc: The 2K restoration is good, and the excellent and enthusiastic contributions by Richard Dyer and John Baxter shed light on virtues that others might consider flaws.

SOMETHING WILD

Jonathan Demme; USA 1986; Criterion UK; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 113 minutes; 1.78:1. Extras: video interviews with Jonathan Demme and screenwriter E. Max Frye.

Reviewed by Kate Stables

One of the most original of the Reagan-era 'yuppie nightmare' films, Demme's screwball-*noir* was overshadowed by the similarly themed *Blue Velvet*, released shortly before. A veritable genre bran-tub, into which E. Max Frye's fleet, zig-zagging script crams road-movie, romance, thriller and even horror elements (that brutal bathroom battle), its abrupt tonal shifts are mediated by its underlying sweetness. Sloughing off her New York *femme fatale* act to reveal a Pennsylvania girl-next-door, Melanie Griffith's Lulu/Audrey straightens up, while Jeff Daniels's cautious corporate stiff is liberated by their transgressive trip, creating a tale of transformations. Demme's generous, wide-ranging interview in the extras lays out how shifts in the film's colour palette (from hothouse sharp to red, white and blue Americana) underpin this. So do the eloquent music choices, shading from upbeat world music to guitar rock as the mood darkens. Oddball detailing (three versions of 'Wild Thing' on the soundtrack, winking cameos by John Sayles and John Waters) combines with the film's thrift-shop styling and edgy playfulness to give it a distinctive tang, marking it out from smooth-edged 80s equivalents such as *Into the Night* (1985). What seals the deal is Ray Liotta's grinning bad-boy malevolence, the actor hired because he alone could scare Demme: "Your hero's only going to be as interesting as your villain is formidable."

Disc: A meticulous transfer, whose green convertible and shiny blue suit pop just as they should. In a modest extras package, the director's 2011 interview is a high point, particularly his account of tracking the "visual anthropology" of small-town 80s America.

Lost and found

A CHILD IN THE CROWD

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Gérard Blain's autobiographical film about a young boy alone in occupied Paris is a disturbing, ambiguous puzzle

Reviewed by Ross McDonnell

A view of the career of Gérard Blain (1930-2000) needs to consider not only his radicality, but his integrity. He was discovered on the streets of Paris and cast as an uncredited extra in Marcel Carné's 1945 Occupation-era fantasy *Les Enfants du paradis*; but his film career proper started over a decade later – he starred in Truffaut's very first short *Les Mistons* (1957), and then in two films by Claude Chabrol: *Le Beau Serge* (1958) and *Les Cousins* (1959).

By now he was a heartthrob, but he did not cash in on his status: though he acted in shorts by Truffaut and Godard, he appeared in precisely none of their subsequent features. In fact, he starred in few French films in the 1960s, moving elsewhere to work in Italian comedies and neorealist dramas, even flirting briefly with Hollywood (as part of John Wayne's animal-trapping team in Howard Hawks's Africa-set *Hatari!*, 1962).

Growing less and less interested in acting, in even being amiable, Blain abdicated his persona as 'the French James Dean' (making way for Alain Delon) and re-emerged in the 1970s as a writer-director with a fully formed aesthetic – not like the directors he worked with, but like those he idolised: Carl Theodor Dreyer, Ozu Yasujiro and Robert Bresson. His directorial debut *Les Amis* (1971), a Golden Leopard winner at Locarno, was already a testament to his style: an eerily austere film, about the intense relationship between a boy and a much older man, not sensational enough to be controversial. Save for *The Pelican* (1973), in which he also starred, and the misunderstood *Pierre and Djemila* (1987), it is Blain's 1976 film *A Child in the Crowd* (*Un enfant dans la foule*) that has lingered longest. This film begins with a small boy – Blain's third consecutive protagonist named Paul – crying in the back seat of his father's car as he is dropped off at a suburban boarding school. A dramatic descent and ellipsis carries us to 1942: Paul, now 12, is adrift in occupied Paris, profoundly lonely and unloved.

Like *Les Amis*, a film both more conventional and more explicit about a shifting sexual relationship at its centre, *A Child in the Crowd* is a film about class. But everything in the film remains backdrop; all elements are distributed equally, leaving the audience to disentangle the issues. One pattern we can discern is a series of inappropriate relationships between Paul and mostly older men – French, German and American soldiers – implicitly transactional and sexual in nature.

More remarkable than this provocative subject matter is the way in which it is treated: direct, detached, with an impersonal indifference that would seem unforgivably cruel, even brutal, but for the autobiographical nature of the raw material. *A Child in the Crowd* has superficial similarities to Truffaut's autobiographical *The 400 Blows* (the *Bildüngsroman* being perhaps the genre Blain's film fits best), but stylistically it is very different. Truffaut himself wrote: "Gérard Blain had the courage to do without oratorical hedges; he offers no 'alibis' for his characters."

Occupational hazards: César Chauveau as 12-year-old Paul in wartime Paris, in *A Child in the Crowd*

The film has an indifference that would seem cruel, even brutal, but for the autobiographical nature of the raw material

The distance between Blain and his onscreen self is disturbing. In lieu of stylisation, mediation or melodrama, there is an uncanny unfeeling that resists and outright refuses to reveal anything of the protagonist's emotional state. The character arc of this child is one of tragic retrogression: this rite of passage and initiation into adulthood is not the emergence of a self but the absolute suppression of one, the film chronicling not a growing outward but retreat inward. Susceptible and vulnerable, this is how Paul learns to survive. Confronted with Blain's stark style, transparent and tremulous, untethered but attentive, the audience is left to stay sensitive to Paul's slow and subtle movements, the smallest of gestures.

Paul's is not a universal experience and perhaps not to be interpreted as such. Irreducibly ambiguous, and dangerously so, the film's uneasy quality challenges the idea that its meaning can be fixed tidily into sterile, sense-making sentences. The film was a difficult proposition, commercially and critically. But Blain's version of his own experience ought not have to carry the burden of tidy explanation, to answer any of the questions it raises – on masculinity, on sexuality, on what exactly happened to this post-war generation of men without fathers.

Though Blain was a socially and politically conscious filmmaker, at bottom his work was deeply personal and uncompromising, both for better and for worse. His films are neither lost nor out of circulation – they do exist, both materially and immaterially, lying in wait at the CNC archives in Bois d'Arcy, west of Paris, brought out for occasional screenings when endorsed or championed, most recently by filmmaker Mia Hansen-Løve.

In the shadow of Maurice Pialat, Jean Eustache and Philippe Garrel, the post-*nouvelle vague* canon from which he has long been excluded, Gérard Blain produced a counter-canon of nine films in three decades – a body of work (honoured again at Locarno, in 1999) with a remarkable coherence and continuity, from which we can begin to grasp the larger portrait of who he was, of the life he sublimated into his art. S

i ***A Child in the Crowd* is screening in 35mm at the Barbican, London, on 18 March**

Books

A study in tyranny: Michael Curtiz directing Spencer Tracy (holding the cell door) on the set of the pre-Code prison drama *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1932)

THE GREAT DICTATOR

MICHAEL CURTIZ

A Life in Film

By Alan K. Rode, University Press of Kentucky, 704pp, ISBN 9780813173917

Reviewed by Farran Smith Nehme

When the director of *Casablanca* (1942) won an Oscar (his second, and the only award he won for a feature), presenter Mark Sandrich gave a hint of Michael Curtiz's future rank in the auteurist pantheon by mispronouncing the name – twice, at the top of his lungs. (It's 'Cur-tezz', not 'Cur-teeze'.) Nowadays 'the genius of the system' is the phrase most often used to explain the making of *Casablanca*; "the happiest of happy accidents" was how the critic Andrew Sarris put it. Both descriptions suggest that even if this most famous of studio films didn't actually direct itself, its genius was the product of a huge number of people working in harmony, like fire-ants creating a floating island.

Yet if pressed to name the greatest Hollywood studio, most would cite Warner Brothers, and Curtiz directed a larger number of that studio's classics than anyone else. Film historian Alan K. Rode, in his massive and hugely enjoyable biography, describes the decisive role his subject played in a host of much loved films – *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945) – and lets Curtiz's work do most of the arguing.

Curtiz was a character straight out of Characterville, a man whose short stature, macho demeanour, autocratic ways and fractured English helped form the stereotypical image of a studio-era director. He was born Emmanuel Kaminer to a Jewish family on Christmas night in Budapest, Hungary, in 1886. As Mihály Kertész, he began making films in his home town in 1912. On the side, Kertész penned some film criticism, including – oh, the irony – articles extolling a film's director as its driving creative force, which Rode claims "detailed the essence of the auteur theory" a half-century before Sarris or *Cahiers du cinéma*. By the time he got an offer from the brothers Warner in 1926, Kertész was nearly 40 and, according to Rode, had already made upwards of 70 films.

He loved the US from the moment he arrived. (The catch was, Jack and Harry Warner hadn't arranged a proper work visa, and for nearly a decade Curtiz's precarious immigration status was a factor in his contract negotiations.) Curtiz, as he was soon renamed, was already a veteran filmmaker, one with an on-set personality like a rampaging bulldog. He'd arrived just before silents began their swift demise, and he was soon at the helm of such pre-Code classics as *Doctor X* (1932) and *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933), both early Technicolor outings that demonstrated Curtiz's signature ability to revisualise camera set-ups on the fly. "Because he understood editing," observes Rode, "he filmed scenes from a variety of angles rather than 'cutting in the camera'."

And because he wanted plenty of angles, Curtiz also "worked people to death" – at least according to *Wax Museum*'s Glenda Farrell, who still liked Curtiz even when many of his actors, perhaps even most, did not. Early on, Rode drily remarks that Curtiz, "more than any other studio director... was responsible for the founding of the Screen Actors Guild". Curtiz thought lunch was for sissies and until groups like SAG began to pester him, he appeared to think going home and sleeping were dispensable luxuries as well. By the time his career was in full flower, and he was beginning his 12-film association with Errol Flynn, the director had settled down a bit, but not much, and the easygoing Flynn grew to detest the man who unquestionably did the most to make him a star. So did Flynn's frequent

Curtiz's short stature, macho demeanour, autocratic ways and fractured English helped form the stereotype of a studio-era director

co-star Olivia de Havilland. Yet all his life, Curtiz maintained a great ability to spot talent – he was an early booster of both Doris Day and the great John Garfield, to name just two – and a knack for drawing out a great performance, including James Cagney's superb turn in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, and Joan Crawford's in *Mildred Pierce*, as well as her deliciously tough mid-career highlight *Flamingo Road* (1949).

Even in the days when Warner Brothers was a glorious factory putting out hundreds of movies a year, and Curtiz was their number one guy, you couldn't notch up 100-plus entries on a Hollywood filmography without a near inhuman amount of drive. Curtiz's secret weapon against the numerous people who hated his guts was the fact that he mostly didn't care. He "eats pictures and excretes pictures", said Peter Lorre, part of the teeming cast of refugees and stars and refugee stars in *Casablanca*. Curtiz alley-catted around enough to father five children, all of whom – along with their mothers – he treated badly. He eventually married the talented screenwriter Bess Meredyth, and one senses that this union lasted despite his infidelity because it combined the comforts of a wife with Curtiz's first love, movies.

Like all artists, however – and Rode makes it clear that's what Curtiz was – the man had an inner life that didn't necessarily show on the set. While Curtiz was notorious throughout Hollywood for carelessness with the treatment of animals, Rode tells of how the director shot a rabbit which was nibbling at his World War II victory garden and was overcome with remorse when the creature tried to limp away. Curtiz took the rabbit to a vet, paid for its treatment and recovery, and never ate rabbit stew again.

Such unexpected emotions show up in some of Curtiz's best films, including *The Sea Wolf* (1941), an underrated adventure story that was recently restored to its full running time, and another film that Rode considers Curtiz's masterpiece: *The Breaking Point* (1950). While it draws from the same Ernest Hemingway novel as Howard Hawks's *To Have and Have Not* (1944), Curtiz's take is very different, a sombre tale of a boat captain (played by John Garfield) reluctantly drawn into criminal activity, dragging his friend (Juano Hernández) along with him. Both politically progressive in its portrayal of a cross-racial friendship and elegantly composed, the film closes with one of the most heartbreaking crane shots in all of cinema, and the ending was Curtiz's idea.

It was perhaps inevitable that Curtiz's life would end nearly simultaneously with his career, when advanced cancer forced him to all but abandon filming *The Comancheros* in 1961. By the time this epic biography ends, it has long since also become a history of studio filmmaking in all its complexity, greed, double-dealing, squabbling, art and magnificence. Rode's massive book is as engaging and swift as one of his subject's own movies; he doesn't excuse Curtiz's worst moments, but he deeply respects him. "Oh, he was a villain," was how Olivia de Havilland recalled Curtiz years later, "but I guess he was pretty good. We didn't believe it then, but he clearly was."

BARBARA LA MARR

The Girl Who Was Too Beautiful for Hollywood

By Sherri Snyder, University Press of Kentucky, 464pp, ISBN 9780813174259

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The famously alluring Barbara La Marr died in January 1926, when she was just 29. By then she was a film star, with a devoted fanbase and a set of excellent reviews for her vamp performances in films including *The Three Musketeers* (1921) and *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922). Her short life had been very full, particularly since she had first found fame and artistic success as a teenage actor performing under her real name of Reatha Watson. However, the reviews of her early stage triumphs were soon overshadowed by more salacious headlines, and a series of bizarre adventures that began in January 1913, when she was apparently kidnapped from her parents' home, and the papers were filled with stories about "the most beautiful girl in Los Angeles". She had attempted to start a movie career before this, but in a sickeningly familiar tale, her Hollywood career was stymied when she refused the advances of a lecherous director.

After the kidnapping scandal, and Watson's subsequent escapades in Los Angeles nightclubs under the assumed name Folly, the commotion she attracted on set made her a liability for any production. She told one reporter, "I am absolutely persecuted because of my fatal beauty." It's a line that might seem disingenuously immodest, except that it echoed the pronouncement of the Los Angeles chief juvenile officer a few months previously: "There is no charge against Miss Watson unless it be that she is dangerously beautiful," he said, explaining the court's decision to ban her from living in the city on threat of arrest.

Studios went to great lengths to avoid rumours about the famous vamp, who once said: 'I take lovers like roses, by the dozen'

Fatal beauty: Barbara La Marr

Watson, despite more entanglements with the law, name changes and marriages both legal and otherwise, spent the rest of her teens as a dancer, moving back to Hollywood in the 1920s to begin afresh, first as a screenwriter and then as an actor. While the hard-working La Marr was successful by any standards, Hollywood was not always a welcoming place. The scandals of her youth, and her hidden identity as Reatha Watson, would soon catch up with her, necessitating a full confession to journalist Adela Rogers St. Johns, published in a bowdlerised form in *Photoplay* magazine, under the headline 'The girl who was too beautiful', before the release of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Studio publicists also went to extraordinary lengths to avoid new rumours swirling around the famous vamp, who once asserted, much to their chagrin: "I take lovers like roses, by the dozen." The idea of her real-life behaviour resembling her antics on screen was clearly unthinkable.

This gripping biography by Sherri Snyder details every twist and turn of La Marr's breathless existence from teenage rebel to beloved star. A note in the preface acknowledges La Marr's tendency to embellish and indeed fictionalise her life story, and there are many incidents in this story that seem implausible – it's a biography begging to become a miniseries – but Snyder has diligently checked her facts against newspaper reports, diaries and memoirs. What emerges is the story of an impetuous, fanciful teenager who became a kind young woman, who successfully channelled her imaginative streak into her film scenarios and her passionate nature into a series of seductive performances.

La Marr was blatantly cast for her unmissable sex appeal, and costumed to capitalise on it, but reviews that criticised the 'vulgarity' of her films reveal the hypocritical puritanism of Hollywood, especially during the early 1920s, when scandals including the Arbuckle trial were damaging the industry's reputation. Even as a star, it seems, La Marr was penalised for her "fatal beauty". And when the unwed La Marr got pregnant just before appearing in *Trifling Women* (1922) for Rex Ingram, Hollywood morality meant she could only keep the child if she agreed to a very public 'adoption' of her own infant son. One of the most poignant chapters of this book concerns the search of La Marr's son for the truth about his parentage. After his mother's death he was raised in a loving home by La Marr's good friend ZaSu Pitts, but as it stands, not even his date of birth has been established.

Although La Marr's death followed a serious respiratory illness, her health was already debilitated by her prolonged heavy drinking, combined with her exhausting schedule, and studio-enforced crash dieting – the latter regime was heavily rumoured to have involved La Marr ingesting a tablet containing a tapeworm. Snyder finds no evidence to support the allegations made elsewhere that La Marr was abusing drugs as well as alcohol. What remains is the story of a woman whose name was made, and life ruined, not by her good looks, but by the careless behaviour of those who sought to take advantage of her beauty.

HITCHCOCK AND THE SPY FILM

By James Chapman, I.B. Tauris, 346pp, ISBN 9781780768441

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Given that books on Hitchcock would now stock a sizeable library to the point of overflowing, staking out a fresh angle becomes *de rigueur* for any writer foolhardy enough to venture on a new one. James Chapman adopts a double approach: to consider in detail the dozen films – five pre-war British, seven wartime and post-war American – in Hitch's output that can be classified as 'spy films', and to rescue them from what he calls "the polemical excesses of the auteur theory".

Central to Chapman's thesis is his contention that, although auteurist elements can undoubtedly be identified in these films, as of course they can in all Hitchcock's work, to view them exclusively in this light narrows and even diminishes our appreciation of their qualities. It's more fruitful, he suggests, to see them equally as the reactions of Hitch and his collaborators both to other films that were being made at the time (their genre status, in other words) and to what was going on around them, focusing on their "representational politics – particularly in relation to nationhood, class and gender – as well as their relationship to the political contexts and ideological conditions in which they were made".

So the five spy films that Hitchcock made at Gaumont-British between 1934 and 1938 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The 39 Steps*, *Secret Agent*, *Sabotage* and *The Lady Vanishes* – can be seen as slotting into a cycle of British spy movies that kicked off at the start of the decade with relatively forgotten specimens like *The W Plan* and *The Last Hour* (both 1930) and achieved major-release status with Walter Forde's *Rome Express* (1932). Some of these looked back to World War I, some – increasingly as the decade wore on – were overshadowed by the rise of fascism and the prospect of war.

I spy: Madeleine Carroll in Alfred Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* (1936)

Similarly, the *noir*-tinged wartime (or just post-war) spy films that Hitchcock made in the US – *Foreign Correspondent*, *Saboteur*, *Notorious* – sit alongside such anti-fascist thrillers as Fritz Lang's *Man Hunt* (1941) and *Ministry of Fear* (1943), Frank Tuttle's *This Gun for Hire* (1942) and Billy Wilder's *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943). The Cold War hovered over the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1955) and *North by Northwest* (1959) – though the latter can also be seen as prefiguring the Bond movies, to which *Torn Curtain* (1966) and to a lesser degree *Topaz* (1969) represent Hitch's rather unsatisfactory response.

Chapman further proposes that two types of spy film can be broadly distinguished in Hitchcock's output: the 'sensational' (*The 39 Steps*, *North by Northwest*) and the 'existential' (*Secret Agent*, *Notorious*), with some (the 1955 *Man Who Knew Too Much*) incorporating elements of both. Along with these insights the author traces the origins and development of each film, whether derived from a pre-existing novel or an original script, and outlines its reception with critics and public. Altogether, Chapman's is a lucid and readable study, refreshingly free from academic jargon, that fully earns its place on the shelves of that overstocked library.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL HITCHCOCK

Vertigo and the Anxieties of Unknowingness

By Robert B. Pippin, University of Chicago Press, 176pp, ISBN 9780226503646

Reviewed by Nick James

"Another academic study of *Vertigo*" was my first weary thought when this book arrived in the mail. I picked it up assuming I'd be putting it on the slush pile within minutes. But no, it drew me in, even though, as you'd guess from the title, it's a film analysis from the perspective of a professional philosopher. It's in a vein of writing established principally by Stanley Cavell in his mission to "confront the culture with itself", especially in his writings on such classic Hollywood remarriage comedies as *The Awful Truth* (1937) and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940).

Since the bulk of *The Philosophical Hitchcock* is, like any other monograph on a single film, taken up with a thorough description of *Vertigo* – probably the most elegant and discursive description you will currently find – I will try here to determine how Pippin inflects that reading to distinguish it from, say, a psychological reading in the film studies tradition or a straightforward appreciative monograph in the BFI Classics series, though this is far from easy.

Vertigo is almost certainly the greatest hall of mirrors/labyrinth of all films, an engine of seemingly endless reverberant meaning around the subject of obsessional love and desire, which is no doubt why it came top in our Greatest Films of All Time poll when we last ran it in 2012 and why there are so many extant studies of it. What Pippin says he wants to do is "offer an interpretation that shows how the film can be said to bear on a philosophical problem". He uses the phrase "imaginatively seeing"

'Vertigo' is the greatest hall of mirrors of all films, an engine of reverberant meaning around the subject of obsessional desire

Kim Novak as Madeleine/Judy with James Stewart

to distinguish an aesthetic approach to film watching from merely following the plot, and says it is about paying attention to questions raised by the work beyond the story itself.

"That's what everybody does," you might say, and Pippin agrees that "it is even more difficult to present a general account of when those questions are distinctly philosophical in character". Indeed we can feel Pippin getting a little lost in a labyrinth of his own when he admits, "The idea that a film... can be understood as a form of... philosophical thought... is not widely accepted".

Yet this qualitative reading of considerable finesse is in the tradition of moral philosophic writing, albeit appearing as a kind of moral psychology. Pippin uses *Vertigo* particularly to explore the state of "unknowingness" in romantic relationships. One of the many compelling ideas he explores is that any romantic relationship between two people actually involves at least six 'people' in terms of how the two are perceived by themselves and their others – as they are, as they see themselves, as they see each other. Then there are the people they aspire to be seen as (making eight). *Vertigo* multiplies the number further because we have a woman, Judy (Kim Novak), pretending to be someone else, Madeleine, who is ostensibly haunted by a third person, Carlotta Valdes; and a man, Scottie, no longer 'himself', who tries to impose the persona of a seemingly dead woman on Judy. Complex it is, but Pippin's reading makes nearly every nuance of Hitchcock's richest work clear, thought-provoking and rewarding.

Read

PANDORA'S BOX

By Pamela Hutchinson, BFI Film Classics/ Palgrave MacMillan, 106pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781844579662

Pandora's Box (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929), starring Hollywood icon Louise Brooks, is an established classic of the silent era. This book recounts the production history of this controversial classic, uncovering new information along the way.

A close, act-by-act reading of the film reveals director G.W. Pabst's strategy for adapting Frank Wedekind's plays for the screen and examines the contribution made by Brooks, and how her enduring cult fame has added to its legacy.

Pamela Hutchinson, editor of the Silent London film blog, revisits and challenges many assumptions made about the film, its lead character and its star. Putting the film in historical and contemporary contexts, Hutchinson investigates how the film speaks to new audiences.

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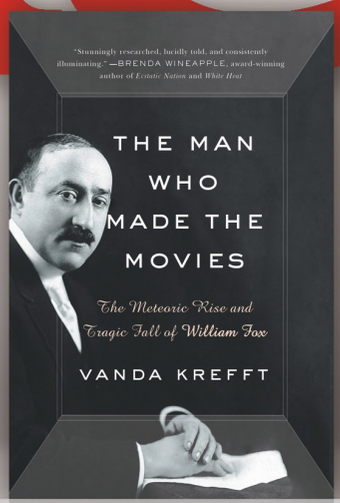

THE MAN WHO MADE THE MOVIES

By Vanda Krefft, HarperCollins, 944pp, hardback, £30, ISBN 9780061136061

A riveting story of ambition, greed and genius unfolding at the dawn of modern America, this landmark biography brings into focus a brilliant entrepreneur – a true American visionary, on a par with Steve Jobs or Walt Disney – who risked everything to realise his bold dream of a Hollywood empire.

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THE BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN HORROR FILM

By Gary D. Rhodes, Edinburgh University Press, 432pp, paperback, illustrated, £24.99, ISBN 9781474430869

Using thousands of primary sources and long unseen illustrations, Gary D. Rhodes examines a history that begins in colonial Salem, taking an interdisciplinary approach to explore the influence of horror-themed literature, theatre and visual culture in America, and to show how that context established an amorphous structural foundation for films produced between 1895 and 1915.

Exhaustively researched and bridging scholarship on horror studies and early cinema, *The Birth of the American Horror Film* is the first major study dedicated to this vital but often overlooked subject.

www.edinburghuniversitypress.com

STAIRWAYS TO HEAVEN

Rebuilding the British Film Industry

By Geoffrey Macnab, I.B. Tauris, hardback, 320pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781788310055

Over recent decades, the British film industry has emerged from peril into a new golden era. As British films have won Oscars and Cannes Palms, releases like the Harry Potter series have found enormous success. The UK industry has seen huge investment, both from Hollywood studios and National Lottery funding. This book portrays the visionaries who helped to reshape the industry. Through vivid first-hand accounts, film critic Geoffrey Macnab provides in-depth analysis of how and why the British film industry has risen like a phoenix from the ashes.

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FEEDBACK

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANOURS

I read with interest Mark Cousins's piece ('The age of consent', *S&S*, March) in which he seemed to pledge allegiance to the #MeToo crowd and its strictures on Woody Allen. Cousins could, of course, have written his article some years ago, so its timing could be viewed as opportunistic. Allen has not been charged with anything; Moses Farrow has defended him. Whether Allen's imagination is onanistic is open to argument, an argument that is not made in this slackly written, moralising piece. Yoking Allen and Polanski together is not defensible.

Using the critic's own formulation: I no longer want to inhabit Mark Cousins's imagination.
Jack Kenny *By email*

SHADOWS AND FOG

This is the first time I have written to *S&S* after being a subscriber and reader for more than 30 years. I was baffled by Mark Cousins's article about Allen. He didn't really say anything specific, though I understand why he would become uncomfortable with supporting somebody who had committed criminal acts while 'entertaining' a mass audience.

I am not trying to defend Allen but the case against him is far from clear-cut, unlike that against Roman Polanski. But while I cannot condone Polanski's personal life, I can watch his films without feeling uneasy, since the motifs in the films have no relation to the offences he was convicted of. Will both directors become too controversial to write about in future?

Allen, on the other hand, has never been convicted. On the same day I received my copy of *S&S*, Hadley Freeman wrote a *Guardian* piece about Allen which ended, "Condemnation needs to have real substance or this much-needed movement [#MeToo] risks becoming meaningless."
Neil Littman *London*

DECONSTRUCTING WOODY

It is always a pleasure to read the humane and lyrical output of Mark Cousins; but his reasoning in his piece about Woody Allen grates.

Going to the cinema for most people is not a moral act. Nor can it be made so by orbiting around the word 'consent'. Cinema used in this way asks the audience to be both jury and policeman, yet set apart from the facts and with only the artwork as guide.

With Polanski his argument is unnecessary, as real-life non-consent was clear. For Allen's cinema, however, the facts relating to repeated allegations of historical abuse are both dreadfully uncomfortable and contested.

Can we be made more certain by viewing his output and extracting the idea of young and overly sexualised talismans? No: for such analysis could apply equally to swathes of brilliant films; literary masterworks; contemporary music and advertising. Start cutting away the taboo from independent and world cinema and we would end up with a very messy floor indeed.

LETTER OF THE MONTH
ASSASSIN'S CREED

Having read the March issue of *Sight & Sound*, I had to put digit to keyboard regarding the magazine's attacks on Woody Allen.

Things began with Mark Cousins's invective. His rambling set of justifications for dismissing the work of Allen were fuelled, he stated, by Dylan Farrow's current accusations – accusations which had been investigated more than 20 years ago and dismissed – alongside what Cousins felt was a general lack of imagination in Allen's latest work. The 'article' is vicious and ridiculous in the extreme: Caravaggio gets off with murder because he has a better imagination than Allen!

It was with some surprise that I then came across the review of Allen's latest film, *Wonder Wheel* (starring Kate Winslet, pictured), and saw that the opprobrium was only just beginning. I have been a long-time subscriber to *S&S*, and I cannot recall a review that is so excoriating about a director:

These attacks were way beyond any sense of objective journalism – it was a character assassination, plain and simple. I expected far better standards from *S&S*. It doesn't strike me as the sort of publication to start behaving like the worst sort of tabloid paper. If the next issue does not address this attack on Allen and introduce a sense of balance regarding his work and legacy, I will not be renewing my subscription.
John Socha By email

I am no apologist for Allen, but labelling his films as degenerate to 'protect us' from their creator risks ejecting much that actually gives cinema its forward-movement and its moral power. It all too readily abandons those around the world, accused solely by way of hints and allegations, for daring to pick up a camera.
Michael Base *Kent*

THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT

Mark Cousins is absolutely right in championing English subtitles for international film classics ('Lost in translation', *S&S*, January). In fact, a lot is already being done. Heritage festivals such as Le giornate deI cinema muto and ll cinema ritrovato use professional services. Film archives possess huge collections of scripts and translations and exchange them via the subtitling network of the FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives). Good translation is essential for making sense of movies – always respecting copyright.
Antti Alanen *Helsinki, KAVI (National Audiovisual Institute, Finland)*

MORAL TALES

The discussion of the sexual politics of *Blade Runner 2049* (Letters, *S&S*, January/February) raises wider questions about a filmmaker's vision and the way morality is expressed and interpreted. In this case it is worth pointing out that in the – superior – original, the female replicants Pris and Zhora are also brutally dispatched – or "murdered" (by Deckard and in slow motion). However, later Roy Batty pointedly and graphically breaks two of Deckard's fingers – one for each female 'life' – in retribution.

A good example of an intelligent filmmaker making a distinction between their own morality and their characters is in *Apocalypse Now* (1979). We are appalled by the mad Colonel Kilgore's murderous, Wagnerian air-strike – surely Coppola's intention – while exalting (not exulting in) the bravura filmmaking and pyrotechnics.

As Gilbert Adair wrote in a superb analysis in *Hollywood's Vietnam*, one reason is that The Ride of the Valkyries is "Kilgore's music" – blasted from the loudspeakers on the Hueys – and not Coppola's. As a result we empathise completely with Captain Willard's observation: "If that's how Kilgore fought the war, I began to wonder what they really had against Kurtz."
Will Goble *Rayleigh, Essex*

Additions and corrections

March p.56 *The Nile Hilton Incident*: Certificate 15, 110m 36s; p.60 *Bombshell The Hedy Lamarr Story*: Certificate 12A, 88m 14s; p.61 *Dark River*: Certificate 15, 89m 34s; p.63 *The Divine Order*: Certificate 12A, 96m 18s; p.67 *Gook*: Certificate 15, 94m 55s; p.67 *The Ice King*: Certificate 12A, 88m 34s; p.70 *Loveless*: Certificate 15, 127m 18s; p.72 *Mom and Dad*: Certificate 15, 85m 39s

ENDINGS...

YI YI

The young protagonist's speech at the close of Edward Yang's superb drama sees him grappling with profound questions of life and death

By Andrew Gutman

Yi Yi (*A One and a Two*, 2000), Edward Yang's intricate portrait of a middle-class Taiwanese family, begins with salaryman N.J. Jian (Wu Nien-jen) arriving at a family wedding. But the real start comes about 15 minutes into the film's nearly three-hour runtime, when that tense but ultimately enjoyable evening is cut short by the news that his mother-in-law has fallen into a coma. By the film's end she has passed away, and the story can be basically understood as 'what happens while Grandma is asleep' – though ultimately not much of it has to do with her. Indeed, Min-min (Elaine Jin), N.J.'s wife, is ostensibly the one most affected by her mother's condition, and she leaves early in the film to recover at an expensive and somewhat dodgy Buddhist retreat – freeing up N.J. to seek closure with an old flame. Their teenage daughter Ting-ting (Kelly Lee) feels guilt about Grandma (she fell into a coma taking out the trash, a chore Ting-ting had left unfinished), but is generally more preoccupied with a rocky love triangle with next-door neighbour Lili (Adrian Lin) and her on-again, off-again boyfriend.

The least obviously affected of the main cast is N.J. and Min-min's young son Yang-yang (Jonathan Chang), who is consumed with more typical schoolboy preoccupations: feuding with teachers, exploring new hobbies – in his case, a budding love of photography – and managing the confounding experience of a first crush, something he approaches with an almost scientific curiosity; it's surely no accident he first realises his feelings while watching a nature documentary about lightning strikes. It's strange, then, that the film should close with a surprisingly sentimental written address from the otherwise soft-spoken Yang-yang at his grandmother's funeral. "I'm sorry, Grandma, it wasn't that I don't like talking to you," he begins, referring to an early scene where he couldn't think of anything to say to her in her comatose state, despite his mother's urgings, "I just think you would already know anything I would tell you." It's an important and flattering assumption from Yang-yang, who was earlier troubled by the realisation that he is unable to look at the back of his own head, asking his father if that meant he could only ever know "half of the truth". Knowledge and experience are high-value commodities for him.

Yang-yang seeks to correct this epistemological crisis with a long series of photographs of the backs of people's heads – earlier in the film, a teacher has mocked his strange photographs as "avant-garde art", but it is this project that really feels like a gallery work. He tells his grandmother, "I want to tell people things they don't know, show them stuff they haven't seen." There seems to be a touch of autobiography in Yang-yang, whose name is written with a character that is a homonym of the director's surname. This is a worthy aspiration for any artist, particularly a photographer or filmmaker, as is, perhaps, Yang-yang's seemingly naive wish to find where his grandmother has gone and bring others to visit her – we can guess that Yang-yang does in fact understand his grandmother is dead, and Yang's films prior to *Yi Yi* certainly never shied away from death.

What Yang-yang takes from his grandmother's death is not the loss of a future, but proof of a life thoroughly lived

But it is Yang-yang's final thought that sticks in the mind the most. He mentions that seeing his new-born cousin – the still nameless product of the marriage that took place at the film's start – makes him remember that Grandma would always say she felt old. That sounds like a complaint, but Yang-yang quite matter-of-factly finishes his short speech by hoping one day that he will be able to say he feels old, too. Again, the prospect of learning and seeing new things is important to him; his Grandma was old and knew many things (he notes she would always tell him to "Listen!", which could as easily have been her scolding an inattentive child as advice for optimum information intake), and therefore if he can reach a point where he can also feel "old", it will mean he has gained that experience. What he takes from his grandmother's death is not the loss of a future, but proof of a life thoroughly lived; the existence of those younger than him gives him proof that this, too, is within his grasp.

The ending of *Yi Yi* has extra resonance for being the final scene in the career of Edward Yang, who died seven years later before he could finish his eighth feature – and first animated film – *The Wind*. Yang-yang's final wish then seems to be one that's shared by a filmmaker who had certainly become 'old' maturing from early angry films of urban malaise in Taipei (*Taipei Story*, 1985; *The Terrorizers*, 1986) to a gentler, kinder point of view. It's a late-career gesture of peace with and hope for the city he built a career on critiquing and despairing over, delivered with precocious eloquence and Yang-yang's small, quietly satisfied smile in the film's final shot.

***Yi Yi* is out now on Blu-ray from the Criterion Collection UK**

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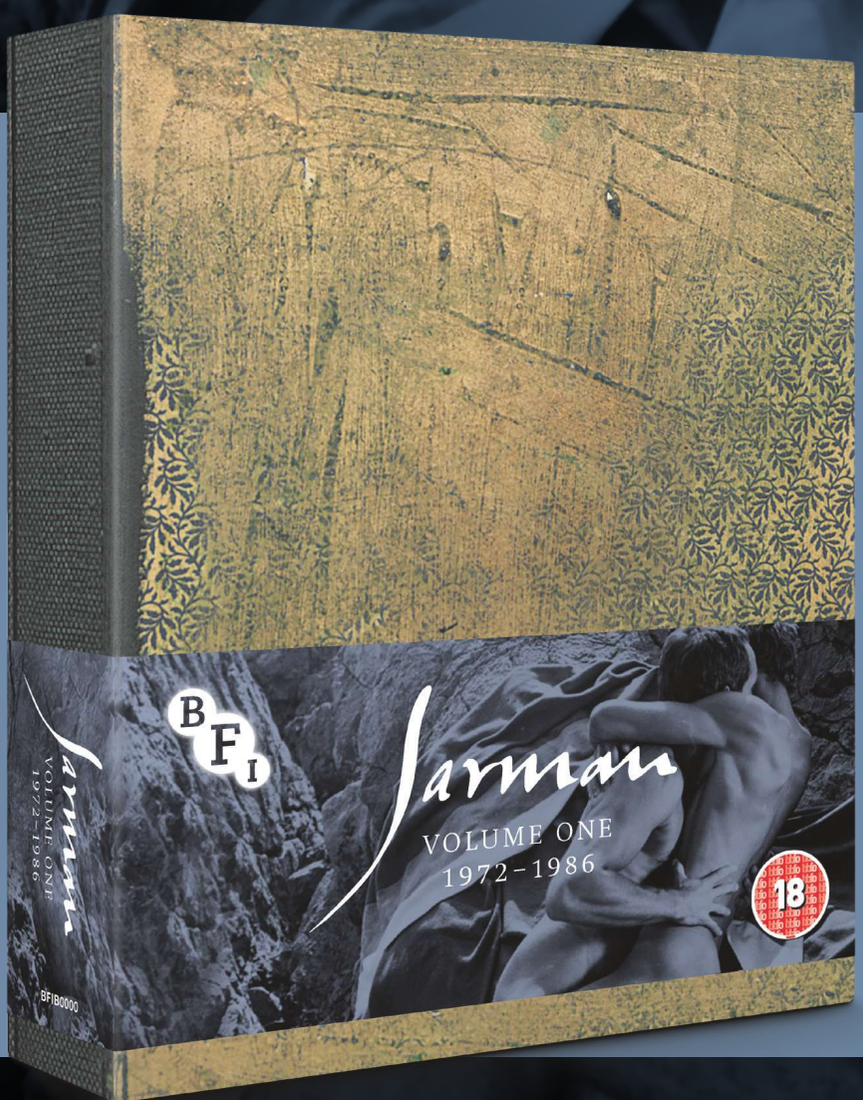

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